Surface and Tactility: New Approaches to Picturing the Female Body

by

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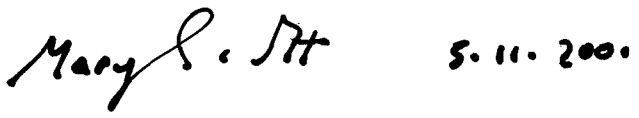

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Abstract

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The project develops alternate forms of representation of the female body in the mediums of oil paint and digital print.

Representations of the body are central to contemporary art practice. Yet there are cogent arguments coming from feminist cultural theory that, in general women's bodies, and particularly the nude, cannot be portrayed other than through forms of representation that expose them to the male gaze. This poses a significant problem for women artists wishing to employ imagery of the female body. The project has explored alternative ways of depicting the female body; ways, which disrupt ocular-centric forms of representation that privilege the spectator by posing the body as displayed object.

The following observations provided the background for this project: within contemporary approaches to representing the female body there is a marked shift away from the figuration of the external body; its depiction occurs less frequently within two-dimensional media; and, its propositions tend to be of a less subjective nature. The project has sought to redress these shortfalls by seeking to re-vision the female body in two-dimensional painting and print-media. It has investigated alternatives to the symbolic body, enshrined within conventional pictures of female nudes, through explorations into embodied subjectivity - the specificities of lived, female experiences. Pictorially these impressions are representational, but the tactile dimensions of imagery, suggested through material surface quality, evoke a palpable

sensuality that disrupts stereotypical patterns of looking. The relationship between tactility and the sense of touch dissolves the psychological and physical distance between the viewer and the picture. Pictorially, the representational framework varied from fragmented and cropped imagery of the female torso to direct illusionistic representations of the whole body.

The outcomes of the research project, in the form of digital prints produced within the final phase, were chosen for exhibition. Initial investigations required the plasticity of paint media to convey the materiality of the imagery but advances, within both digital image layering processes and printing techniques resulted in a shift towards digital prints as principal output. The exhibition is, however, inclusive of key works, both prints and paintings, illuminating major developmental points encountered in the course of the project.

The written exegesis includes documentation of practical and conceptual inquiries, together with an exploration of the underlying themes of the project placed in context through discussion of both historical and contemporary art.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this thesis to my mother Robin Scott who would have been proud to see it brought to fruition.

I would like to thank my supervisor Geoff Parr for all his advice and encouragement. Further thanks to Jonathan Homes, Patricia Scott and my father Dereham Scott for their comments and editing skills. Special thanks to Bill Hart without whose patience and faith the completion of this thesis would not have been possible. And finally thanks to my son Morgan who in the first years of his life has graciously witnessed the trials and tribulations of undertaking such a project.

I extend thanks to John Farrow for his consistently excellent documentation of art-work, and to Bill Hart for his assistance in laying out and printing the exegesis.

Contents

Section One: Central Argument

Outline of Project

The outline of the project is as follows:

- Perceptions about gender and the sexual female body provide the content.
- The general problem, posed in painting and digital prints, is to find a means to give effective visual form to embodied subjectivity.
- After investigations in studio practice and contextual readings, approaches to the representation of female sexuality, at variance to stereotypical images of the female body, have been developed and refined.
- The outcome is a suite of paintings and digital prints submitted for examination and, as required by the course outline in the University's Research Higher Degrees Handbook, 2001, the exhibition contains the original discourse of the project.

Introduction

The body is both the subject of, and inspiration for, this project. The psychological and physiological complexity of the body has long been at the centre of my curiosities and its representation formative within my art practice over some years. In more precise terms the body at focus for this project is the female sexual body. The sexual body is expressive of a complex of cognisant and unconscious desires that not only signify gender, but also give rise to issues of identity and self-definition.

The representation of the human sexual body is distinctive within cultural

history. Its lineage dates from humankind's earliest attempts at visual communication. With the representation of the sexual body pivotal to human expression, any study of its traditions will unveil a history of the intimacies of human relations deeply entwined within the moral and philosophical fabric of any given society. Peter Brooks suggests that the sexual body is so integral to social relations that the 'laws' generated by human sexuality may themselves be considered as "foundational of social structure and regulation."[1] The intrinsic nature of the sexual body has meant that, historically, artists have calculated upon its subversive potential to disrupt discursive hierarchies and expand demarcations within societies.

Of course, sexuality of the body applies equally to both male and female bodies, but this project is concerned specifically with the female sexual body and more precisely with its representation. Nowadays, the picturing of the female body is nearly always political; it seems that its representation can never be free from its historical positioning as an object arranged for the viewer's gaze.[2] Vision, the ascendant sense of 'knowing' within Western

[1] **Brooks**, Peter, *Body Works: Objects of Desire in Modern Literature*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993 p6.

[2] The picturing of the sexual body throughout recent centuries reflects an extreme imbalance in the treatment of the genders. At times when the male body has been central to artistic representation, for example within early Greek art and throughout the Renaissance, the male figure is more likely to be represented as heroic; his body captured in a moment of action, combat, or struggle rather than displayed as image of eroticism. These forms of male nudity can be attributed to the belief in the male body as the social "body par excellence, the measure of the world." (**Brooks** 1993 p16.) Inversely, from very early on, the female body has appeared as the object of erotic display for the specifically gendered spectator. In the Hellenistic period the female nude represented as *Venus pudica*, drew attention to her sex through its partial covering. From this time the female nude is increasingly depicted as highly erotic content - during the Renaissance in the form of mythological scenes referencing Venus, Diana or other goddesses, and later in intimate scenes depicting women bathing or reclining exposed on a bed. In recent centuries the acceptability of these types of depictions has meant that woman's sex has flourished as acceptable for public display. The representation of the phallus, on the other hand, has possibly come to be the ultimate taboo object of our recent culture, with its depiction still illegal in most western societies. Brookes argues that the penis remains inaccessible to representation because we continue to live in a culture in which patriarchy is the basis of knowledge and power, and in which the gaze is phallic. Its depiction is seen to strip men of their

society, has come to be recognised as typically a male prerogative. The conventions of the male 'gaze' are so thoroughly internalised within our social make-up, that developing alternatives to standard depictions of the female nude continues to be a fraught and difficult enterprise. Women artists are not at liberty to employ imagery of the female body, without first acknowledging that the desire for self-representation carries with it the history of the female body in representation as seen predominantly through the male gaze.

From the earliest days of feminist activity, women's ventures into self-determination through the representation of their own bodies have met with limited success. Feminists' early attempts at the representation of femininity as different from masculinity have since been haunted by criticism of essentialism, and of limiting definitions of woman to their bodies. A second generation of feminists brought recognition to the role society plays in the construction of gender by highlighting specific discursive practices that devise femaleness as distinct from maleness. Women artists, rather than seeking positive forms through which to represent themselves, re-deployed instead "techniques and images from popular media and art to deconstruct images (of femininity) that had been constructed according to the 'patriarchal' ideal."[3] The recognition of representation as the mechanism that both creates and compounds ideological images of femaleness made it all but impossible for women to entertain ideas of representing their subjectivity through imagery of their bodies. This situation has been made more complex in recent years by the ideas put forward by post-structuralist theory. Post-structuralism disavows the existence of the essential person within the 'speaking subject', arguing instead that identity is formed through cultural and linguistic structures. This positioning suggests that identity can

empowering veil. For a more detailed account of the differences between the representation of male and female bodies see **Brooks** 1993 pp16-18.

[3] **McDonald**, Helen, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art*, London: Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group), 2001 p2.

only ever be provisional because it is relational and contingent upon a set of subject positions.[4]

Neither deconstruction and post-structuralist theories offer a positive direction that might lead to productive representations of the female body.[5] This situation, compounded by the theoretical renouncing of essential subjectivity, has meant that, throughout the eighties and nineties, representations of female nudity effectively disappeared from women's art practice. While not supporting a return to any form of naïve essentialism, and acknowledging the role of society in the formation of subjectivity, I believe that an absolute rejection of the essential self is limiting. Not only does it restrict definitions of women by disavowing the importance of bodily experiences within the formation of subjectivity, but it also precludes notions of subjective agency brought about by the self-determining individual. Authors Janet Wolff,[6] Marsha Meskimmmon[7] and Rosi Braidotti[8] support the idea of embodied subjectivity and argue for its acknowledgment. Wolff writes that: "the instability of the category 'woman' ... need not lead to the conclusion that the subject is irrevocably dispersed"[9] and Meskimmmon suggests that by acknowledging the embodied subject and refusing to eliminate the subject altogether, women can recapitulate their rejection of "the traditional masculine subject as transcendent."[10] Braidotti arguing for the primacy of embodied experience writes:

[4] **McDonald** 2001 p21.

[5] **McDonald** 2001 p2.

[6] **Wolff**, Janet, 'Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics', in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

[7] **Meskimmon**, Marsha, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

[8] Braidotti in **Meskimmon** 1996 p200.

[9] **Wolff** 1990 p134.

[10] **Meskimmon** 1996 p200.

> In the refusal to disembody sexual difference into a new, allegedly postmodern, anti-essentialist subject, and the will to reconnect the whole debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women ... one should start politically with the assertion of the need for the presence of real-life women in positions of discursive subjecthood, and theoretically with the recognition of the primacy of the bodily roots of subjectivity.[11]

While the nature of subjectivity remains elusive, we have, in recent years, witnessed a renewed interest in the body as subject for art practice.[12] What is evident about recent work, however, is that there is a marked shift away from the figuration of the external female body;[13] its depiction is occurring less frequently within two-dimensional media; and, its propositions tend to be of a less subjective nature. These general observations provided the background for this project; its motivation, broadly speaking, grounded in the desire to reclaim the female body and its sexuality, as fertile subjects for creative expression within painting and print-media. It has sought to re-vision the female body, to picture it differently from its social marking enshrined in conventional depictions of the female nude. The images formed throughout the project do not privilege the spectator by posing the body as displayed object; rather they attempt to convey the mark of the body itself. This is primarily a tactile and corporeal body. The images reveal desires and sensations of embodied subjectivity - the specificities of lived, female experience.

[11] Braidotti quoted by **Meskimmon** 1996 p200.

[12] The last decade has show-cased this renewed interest through major exhibitions such: *L'Ame et Corps*; the *Bad Girls* Exhibitions; *Identity and Alterity: Figures of the Body*; *Femininmasculin*; and *Body*.

[13] The body within recent art practice is characterised by the body-in-pieces; the breaking open of the body's external boundaries to reveal it as a more fluid and corporeal entity. While the project draws on similar ideas, its difference is expressed through the attempt to express the corporeality of the body directly through the naked female form. Advertising and media imagery for the most part still focus on representations of the external body as signifiers of gender difference.

The Problem

The problem of recovering the female body as subject for representation brought to the fore two fundamental questions. These were formative in guiding and defining both the conceptual and formal directions of the project. They were:

- Are there alternatives within conventional representational systems through which imagery of female embodied subjectivity can be explored and evoked?
- Is it possible to 'know' the body through ways other than the visual and thereby create representations that express something of this knowing?

These questions were explored in the first instance through practical work but to guide progress readings were undertaken within two principal areas: 'The Gaze within Western Pictorial Tradition' and 'Feminism, Subjectivity and the Body in Representation'.

The Gaze within Western Pictorial Tradition

Representations of the female body invariably make prominent the issue of the gaze. The gaze is considered to be predominantly phallic, its central characteristic enshrined by the genre of the nude, an artistic tradition that has overwhelmingly featured men looking at women.[14] These representations have privileged the visual experience of a spectator, his look reducing the nude to the status of desired object. The emphasis on visual experience

[14] Helen McDonald argues that the idealised nude of classical art finds its continuity in fashion photography, video clips and other forms of popular visual culture. These avenues of publication "dominate as purveyors of body image", and are sustained in the interests of late capitalism. (**McDonald** 2001 pp1-2.) McDonald suggests that feminist deconstruction is "ill prepared" to decide whether these "fantasies of looking" are exploitative. She writes: "Over the past twenty-five years, advertising, the very area in which insult to women inherent in visual representations was first identified, has won recognition for itself as a respectable area of popular culture, partly *because* of its erotic ocularcentrism." (**McDonald** 2001 p85.)

finds its inheritance within perspectivalism, a pictorial system that has long defined Western cultural practice. Intrinsic to the organisation of perspectival pictures is a defined viewpoint denoting the ideal position from which the picture should be viewed. This point is usually distant from the pictured illusionism; the viewer can observe a naked bathing nymph from a remote position, one that precludes the possibility of engagement beyond the cerebral.

A central premise of perspectivalism is this accent on comprehension through distant observation. Perspectivalism typifies the general belief in vision, distinguished as the most objective and "the most excellent of the senses",[15] as a central faculty in the search for knowledge and truth within Western societies. The continuity of perspectivalism with its emphasis on the visual has been at the forefront of concerns within recent feminist cultural theory. Its persistence as a cultural force means that, in general, women's bodies (particularly if nude) cannot be portrayed without being subjected to its regimes of looking. Feminist theory has centralised the need to challenge this long-standing model. Practitioners and theorists alike have argued that it is only through disruption of the conventions of perspectivalism that new possibilities for representation can be opened up.

Feminism, Subjectivity and the Body in Representation

In recent decades, women artists have sought new possibilities for self-representation beyond the ocular-centric bias of perspectivalism.[16] Approaches are, of course, varied but it is possible to identify two distinct methods that have featured prominently within contemporary art. The first is identified by a common desire to undermine stereotypical representations of women and femininity through the use of transgression. Artists

[15] **Jonas**, Hans quoted by **Brooks** 1993 p96.

[16] Challenges to perspectivalism have come from gays and trans-sexuals, social groups traditionally marginalised by patriarchal structures.

contravene boundaries that give definition to gender in order to expose the way that identity is primarily constructed from 'signs' produced by society. The subversion of subject/object relations within the visual field is of central concern to many of these practices.

The second takes as its subject the corporeal body, and this body takes form in the 'grotesque', the 'abject' and the 'monstrous'. The 'abnormality' of the 'grotesque' and 'monstrous' body is seen to act in opposition to the balanced and symmetrical body, epitomised in iconography of the sanitised, and idealised, nude. The 'grotesque' body is expressed through representations that emphasise the base, physical body - its orifices, genitals, fluids and internal organs. Contemporary artists have adopted the image of the 'monstrous' body because through its inversion of norms, it can subvert the organising principles of perspectivalism. Its contrary structures provide alternate languages through which women can begin to speak of their experiences; experiences that differ from those socially prescribed as female.

Recent interest in the 'abject' body points to the lack of positive structures through which women can express their subjectivity. The perceived difficulty of representing the external female body, without reiterating conventional symbolism that has defined gender difference in patriarchal discourse, has undoubtedly been a defining factor in artists' choice to express their subjectivity through such motifs.

The Significance of the Project

The project bases its significance on three points; the first two relating to perceived areas of oversight within recent practice and the last to a growing area of interest in contemporary art.

- I have had as a central objective the desire to express different ways of picturing the female sexual body, outside and beyond influential cultural and ideological frameworks. The emphasis has been on the importance

of finding alternative ways through which women can visually express their intrinsic experiences. The traditional marginalisation of women's voices, and a world increasingly moving towards depersonalisation and loss of individuality, would seem to make more urgent the expression of experiences of embodiment. Alternative representations can help to undermine rigid gender classifications and weaken stereotypes that predominate and maintain prevailing social hierarchies. While acknowledging that it is impossible to control every meaning available to an artwork, the pictures created within the project offer alternatives to preconceived viewing relations and challenge audiences to rethink representation. It remains necessary to re-vision women's experiences if social and cultural forms are to continue to change.

- The project's objective has been to make representations of female subjectivity divergent from the symbolic representation prevalent within conventional pictures of the female nude. The pictures have attempted, instead, to indicate the experiences of the corporeal body. Pictorially these impressions are representational, but the tactile dimensions of imagery, suggested through surface quality and pictorial space, evoke a palpable sensuality that disrupts stereotypical patterns of looking. The emphasis on the corporeal body finds similarities with other contemporary 'practices of the body' but the project differs through its personification of the female nude within painting and digital prints. The representation of the female body in two-dimensional media has, in recent decades, been neglected in preference for performance, time-based and installation art-forms. The project is significant for re-visioning the female sexual body as primary subject for pictorialism.
- The project also makes contributions to the gradual embrace of digital technologies within the conventions of traditional art practice. As with the advent of any new technology, it takes some time for that technology to be assimilated within other fields. The project has spurred me to reflect upon the role of digital technologies within my practice formerly

based on painting. Significantly, practical investigations have enabled me to push digital imaging beyond its more direct applications within the areas of photography and the visual mass media. While my initial use of imaging technologies, as a sophisticated collage tool, was a somewhat simplistic interpretation of its potential, subsequent developments overturned this basic approach. The level of proficiency gained in the later stage of the project enabled me to subvert the obvious applications of imaging processes, and these developments led to results that, I believe, are in many ways unique within current art practice.

- Of additional importance were methodologies developed for printing. Throughout the course of the project, unlimited access to appropriate computers and printers has enabled me to trial and develop methods of printing that incorporate a range of surface variation and accurate colour registration. The expense of large printers and computers with sufficient RAM and disk space means that many artists working within digital print media are dependent on commissioning commercial bureaus for final printings of large format works. Although this can lead to satisfactory results, these services are primarily run by trained personnel, with little colour management knowledge and less willingness to undertake repeated trials; this means there is some loss of control over output colour and certainly less variation in print character. The expertise I have gained in recent years within digital printing is invaluable, not only to my own practice, but to the wider field of art.

Major Developments within the Practical Research

To conclude this section I have provided a summary of the major research areas investigated within the project. A more elaborate account of developments can be found in Section Three: In the Studio. All investigations were undertaken within the media of painting and digital imaging with outcomes formalised through oil painting on glass and large

format inkjet prints. Developments were exhibited throughout the project through regular solo and group exhibitions, and conference papers also discussed details of practice.[17]

The central objective - to make representations of the female body - was determined from the outset of the project. The decision to subvert the detached viewpoint of conventional viewing relations was also settled from an early stage. The further objective to focus on tactile qualities and surface character evolved out of investigations undertaken in phases one and two. These properties, I decided, offered possibilities of altering the viewer's relationship to the imagery within the pictorial field. The idea was that the sense of materiality, suggested by dense and detailed surfaces, would convey the sensation of touch. The association of touch with closeness would dissolve the psychological and physical distance between the viewer and the picture. This idea was carried through to the gestures and postures of the figures. These were contrived for the connections they made with the physical body. Through actions such as blowing, licking, squeezing, laughing and screaming, I wanted to evoke and describe the contact senses of touch, taste and sound.

Digital imaging played a significant role in image development. The seamlessness made possible by Adobe Photoshop[18] enabled diverse source materials to be woven into new configurations. This seamlessness is at the centre of my practice as I work with photographic, video and found imagery in conjunction with directly-scanned objects. The framework of illusionistic representation, determined to a large extent by the photographic origins of imagery, was a 'given' throughout - although the form this took varied. For example in early imagery, the pictures, derived from fragmented parts of the female body, were pictorially more abstract than later work. Investigations led to the trialing of direct illusionistic representations, and cropped and

[17] Refer to Curriculum Vitae - Appendix E

[18] Adobe Photoshop was the primary application used through out the project.

distorted images primarily of the female torso. The intention at all stages, however, was to create within my pictures, an ambiguity between different forms of representation. I wanted to encapsulate within both paintings and prints, the 'factuality' of photographic imagery, the simulations made possible by digital imaging processes, and the surface density that results through paint layering techniques. The degree to which this was successful also varied throughout the project, with some pictures maintaining a stronger link to their photographic origins. I felt that the suite of images focusing primarily on the torso, completed in the final stage of the project, were the most successful in conveying the ambiguity I sought.

As already mentioned the tactile quality of imagery, both within paintings and prints, has been of primary concern within all phases of the project. The quality of surface within the paintings was achieved through repeated layering of fine scumbles and glazes. The realisation of a resonant print surface also required extensive layering processes, but this was at the image development stage within the computer. Experimentation into layering imagery and textures within Photoshop, revealed a correlation between the number of layers and pictorial density. The complex layering processes I developed in the later phases of the project enabled me to produce prints that are visually richer than those created from a single image layer. Unlike the paintings,[19] the digital prints reflect considerable advances on a technical level - an achievement necessitated by a desire to overcome the homogenous surface quality particular to digital prints. I undertook thorough and often laborious print trialing, experimenting with both noise filters[20] and with colour, tone and contrast adjustment layers to achieve satisfactory print quality. Practical advances in print processes, together

[19] The paintings reflect formal and pictorial inquires rather than processes of overt technical experimentation.

[20] The term noise is a technical one. It refers to a patterned 'screen' that is placed over the image immediately prior to printing to break the image into small dots or marks. I employ noise layers to soften and diffuse hard edges and to create surface variation.

with advances in printer technologies, determined the shift towards prints as principle output.

This thesis brings together ideas about gender, representation and artistic practice. It is not arguing for new languages, but for alternatives within existing frameworks of representation. The project has not attempted to define an all-encompassing statement about female sexuality, nor to articulate, within this contextual exegesis, a definitive statement about the complex and changing relationship between women, representation and their bodies. Feminist theories of spectatorship provided a framework for the development of practical work, rather than issues for critical or theoretical analysis. While recognising the vital role played by post-structuralist, psychoanalytical and deconstruction theory, in the destabilisation of patriarchal orthodoxies, the project has been directly concerned with the practicalities of making representations of the female body in images, rather than deliberating extensively on theoretical issues. The contextual material reflects this within the emphasis placed on discussion of artistic approaches to issues of self-representation and pictorial representation in general.

The paintings and digital prints created throughout the project were inspired by intrinsic experiences and personal perceptions of gender - an awareness heightened by the contrasts between my life experiences and the often-conflicting actuality of social interactions and the expectations that arise from these. The intimate nature of the imagery clearly derives from personal reflections but as observations I consider them as signifiers of a wider social field. I have optimism that these reach beyond an inner preoccupation and reflect, on many levels, the experiences of others.

Section Two: The Context of the Work

Introduction

This section of the exegesis provides the contextual background to my practice. Included within it are both contemporary and historical materials elucidating issues relevant to my project of picturing female subjectivity. Topics are primarily discussed through the work of art practitioners. Of specific note are the French Neo-classical artist Ingres; the Photorealist painter, Richard Estes; the Modernist painter Georgia O'Keefe; and the Feminist art of Laura Godfrey-Issacs, Rosa Lee, Eve Muske, Jenny Saville, Carolee Schneemann, Annie Sprinkle and Linda Sproul. Apart from my direct appreciation of their art, these artists have been selected for inclusion because conceptual and formal aspects of their work elucidate principal research concerns underlying practical work undertaken within this project. Thus, for example, I have examined detail and illusionism as attributes within the art of Ingres, Estes and O'Keefe. I have discussed these features in order to show how highly detailed illusionism creates readings of significance in both their, and my own, art. The paintings of Godfrey-Issacs, Lee, Muske and Saville have been included for both their formal and conceptual approaches to picturing female subjectivity. The video and performance work of Schneemann, Sprinkle and others are discussed principally to explicate conceptual issues faced by feminist artists seeking new possibilities for representing subjectivity. The inclusion of artists has been determined by the common thread that each has through their practice, intentionally or not, undermined the organising principles of perspectivalism, the system of representation that has provided a durable

paradigm in western cultural practice.[21]

The chapter is divided into five parts with each part addressing individual areas of contextual interest. Although each part is treated discretely points discussed under a particular heading may overlap or parallel concerns considered elsewhere. It is important to note that context material has had different degrees of significance upon the practical research, some areas having less relevance to the final outcome of the project than others.[22] All material considered throughout the project, however, has been included in some form; it both records the breadth of readings undertaken in correspondence with practical work, and illuminates conceptual and formal issues relevant to the development of that work. The order of parts does not reflect a chronology of investigations but rather an organisation that brings a fluid interaction between one part and the next. The wide-ranging approach taken within this chapter reflects within it the multi-faceted nature of art practice.

I have been fortunate throughout the course of my studies to be able to view first hand many art works of relevance to this project. Although not all included for discussion within this chapter the following works and exhibitions are of note: *Cindy Sherman Retrospective*, MCA, Sydney (1998); *The Body*, AGNSW, Sydney (1997); *The Portraits of Ingres*, Metropolitan Museum and Art Gallery, New York (1999); *Kiki Smith*, Pace

[21] Svetlana Alpers has argued that since the Renaissance perspectivalism has proved to be an influential and enduring model for artists, theoreticians and art historians alike. She writes: "To a remarkable extent, the study of art and its history has been determined by the art of Italy ... Italian art and the rhetorical evocation of it has not only defined the practice of the central tradition of Western artists, it has also determined the study of these works ... Since the institutionalisation of art history as an academic tradition, the major analytic strategies by which we have been taught to look at art or to interpret images ... were developed in reference to the Italian tradition." **Alpers**, Svetlana, *Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, London: Penguin Books, 1989 ppxix-xx.

[22] For example the part on gender and painting has less direct bearing on the final outcome of the work in the media of digital prints.

Willdernstein Gallery, New York (1999); *Sensation*, Brooklyn Museum and Art Gallery (1999); *Nicky Hoberman*, Feigen Gallery, New York (1999); *John Curran*, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York (1999); and *Territories: Jenny Saville*, Gagosian Gallery, New York (1999); *Bronzino*, Uffizi Gallery, Florence (1991); *Van Eyck*, various collections throughout Germany and Vienna (1999).

1. The Politics of the Particular and the Particularity of Perspectivalism

"I have a taste for the detail"[23] the forgotten, the overlooked.[24]

I have always sought out particulars and details within pictures. My enthusiasm for these fragments extends equally to my appreciation of art reproductions and my contemplation of paintings through first-hand viewing. Consuming the pattern of lace in a cuff, I find myself myopically peering into minute passages of overlooked details; inspecting the glint of light in the pearls of a necklace, determining the means of a microscopic reflection in a metallic vase or probing the intricacies of a wrinkled silk stocking. Isolating details in such a manner can bring to them a range of impressions and connections that may have little in common with the symbolic significance of the total image.

In aesthetic terms, 'particularity' often has pejorative implications.

[23] Roland Barthes is said to have confessed: "I have a taste for the detail ...." quoted by **Schor**, Naomi, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*, New York N.Y.: Methuen N.Y., 1987 p3.

[24] My interest in exploring the aesthetics of detail was further fuelled by a passing comment made to me by a male friend as we sat drawing the landscape on an excursion to Waterfall Bay in south east Tasmania. As I contemplated and drew a range of detailed studies of objects and fragments lying close around me my friend sketched an image of the distant cliffs, sky and horizon. His comment: "women always draw the particular whilst men the bigger picture" fuelled speculation on my behalf as to whether, as it seemed, this generalisation may contain an element of truth.

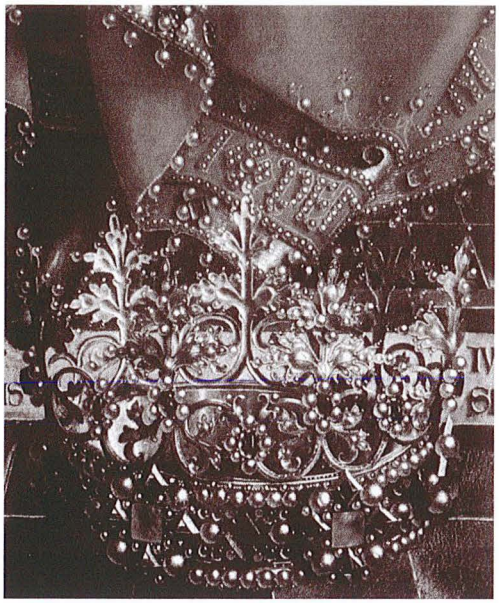

Fig 1. Jan van Eyck, *Ghent Polytych* (detail), 1432

'Particularity' is associated with words like *embellishment*, *flourish*, *superficial*, *garish*, *gaudiness*, *gilt*, *trimming*, *impure*, *overloaded* and *vulgar*[25] and certainly, within modernist aesthetics, has come to represent a debased form of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, details are not only viewed negatively but particularity, through its association with decoration and ornamentation, has in recent centuries, also come to be associated with femininity. Preliminary contextual inquiries were fuelled by the desire to discern why certain forms of pictorial representations had come to be considered as more negligible than others, and why there existed a correlation with gender, because my understanding was that these ideas had not always existed within Western cultural tradition. My readings revealed two points of concern for this exegesis. The first is that the perspectival model of describing the world gives vision a privileged role in the comprehension of that world; secondly, a hierarchical system of values arising from the Enlightenment period defined what was fundamental to aesthetic concerns over ensuing centuries. Although at first glance there seems little parity between the above two developments, occurring several centuries apart, what connects the two is the belief in vision as the primary way of knowing the phenomena of the world. The emphasis perspectivalism placed on vision, as the primary way of describing the world was reinforced by the Enlightenment project that confirmed sight as the most objective, and therefore the most capable of the

[25] **Kirkpatrick**, Betty, (ed) *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1988.

senses for revealing innate truths. Of relevance is that, as the Western world became increasingly dependent on vision,[26] information and impressions gained through the tactile senses of touch, taste and smell came to be considered as less determinable and therefore less valid than that gained through vision.

In association with these developments the idea evolved that particularity obscured the authentic visual experience of things and this translated within art to the development of an hierarchy of aesthetic ideals that valued clarity of form above detail and ornamentation. In time, as public life became increasingly separated from private life and gender roles became more defined within social life, femininity came to be associated with ornateness and particularity; a correlation that has since come to bear the mark of biological fact.[27] If we scratch the surface of these so-labelled idiosyncrasies of gender, what is revealed is a move to distinguish the cultural output of the sexes in order to endorse the hierarchical division of aesthetics along gender lines.

The Primacy of Vision

The belief in vision as the prime sense for understanding the world has been entrenched since the Renaissance when modes of perception underwent a

[26] In his book *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, Martin Jay traces the 'ocular-centric discourse' of Western history. (Jay, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994.)

[27] There were of course many factors that led to this division but of note was the increasing social separation between the public world of work (men) and the private domestic sphere (of women). The relationship of femininity to the decorative remains a common belief even today. In the late 1960s and early 1970s artists sought to assert the decorative along with other 'female arts and crafts' as a primary subject for art, a development that occurred as part of a broader reaction to the male dominated world of modernist pure abstraction. In reality the promotion of the 'female arts' only reconfirmed the association by affirming the decorative as inherent to female sensibility. The relationship of femininity and particularity finds its alternative in the 'marriage' of masculinity with abstraction, simplicity and certitude.

profound shift from the haptic to the optic.[28] Underlying this change was the philosophical conviction that vision would provide the impartiality necessary for the accurate recording of phenomena and the disclosure of worldly 'truths.' Parallel developments in mathematics and geometry provided necessary confirmation of the equation of sight with 'truth.' These 'tools' provided the means by which man could objectively record and map the physical and spatial world from a detached and impartial viewpoint.[29]

In art, the search for objective visual truth found its equivalence in the invention of perspective. Leon Battista Alberti formulated a system based

[28] In her article 'Kama and Eroticism: The five senses in the work of Francesco Clemente and Pierre Klossowski' Jill Bennett discusses the haptic (tactile) appreciation of art as a prominent feature of late medieval Italian painting. (**Bennett** 1997 in **Bond**, Anthony, (Ed and Curator) *Body*, exhibition catalogue AGNSW Australia: Schwartz Publishers, 1997 pp129-139.) During this period the appreciation of an image operated through the principle of metonymy. So for example in the appreciation of a painting depicting the passion of Christ the viewer was confronted by an image that sought "not to engage the eye at a distance" but rather "to bring the spectator into the proximity of the body of the holy figure depicted." (**Bennett** 1997 p130.) Bennett describes the relationship between medieval imagery and the spectator as 'ballistic'. The viewer's comprehension of such imagery came through a mix of experience and imagination; that is, he/she was to feel the spirit of Christ's passion, rather than making sense of it through an interpretation of a specific narrative. Walter Ong argues that this movement from the haptic to the optic was one of the most momentous developments in Western intellectual history. (**Ong** Walter, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London and New York: Methuen, 1982 p117.) Ong traces the developments that brought about this shift, citing as of central significance the invention of the printing press. He reasons that with the invention of the printing press, knowledge became less ephemeral because it was literally possible to 'see' knowledge from an objective position. However, while Ong pinpoints the Renaissance as the point at which this shift occurred, others, such as Jay, have argued that sight as the absolute sense has been central to Western societies since the early Greeks. (**Jay** 1994.)

[29] This all-seeing external viewpoint marked a crucial shift from the medieval conception of man embedded *within* the landscape, a shift that was reinforced by a marked growth in exploration and trade. As man began to explore the broader dimensions of the world, more accurate mapping techniques recorded oceans and territories that had previously been conceived as barriers. Through their visual mapping onto two-dimensional surfaces these previous boundaries came to be regarded as 'knowable' space. Erwin Panovosky wrote that the vanishing point in perspective is relative to a 'shift in worldview from the concept of a closed universe to an infinite expanse, a never-ending recession and expansion of space, endlessly purveyable (s) by an enterprising, colonising and capitalising subject/gaze". (Panovsky paraphrased by **Schneider**, Rebecca, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, London and New York: Routledge 1997 p 70.)

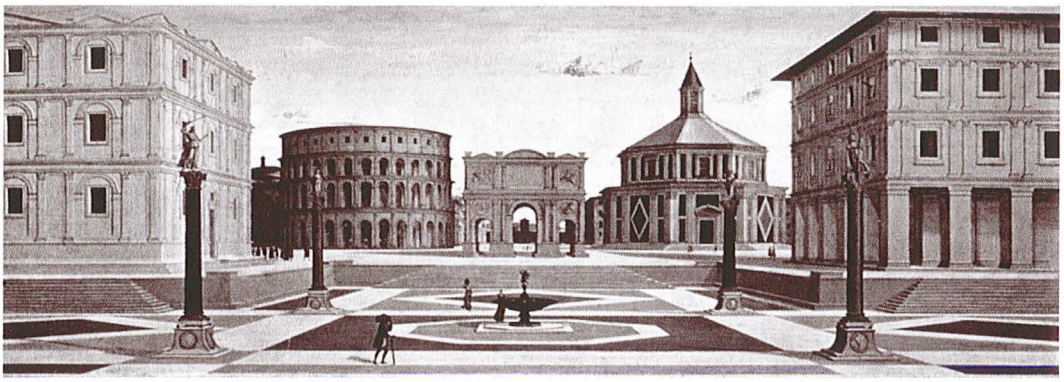

Fig 2. Luciano Laurana, *Architectural Perspective*, c1575

on geometry that delineated solid objects upon a surface so that the drawing produced the same impression of apparent relative positions, magnitudes and distance, as did actual objects when viewed from a particular point. The receding parallel lines underscoring the basis of perspective meet at the vanishing point in exact proportion to the point of the viewing eye and this was thought to accurately reflect the way we see.[30] As the means of correctly recording perception, Alberti's method was flawed because it was formulated on the principle of a single (monocular) viewpoint. The single viewpoint locates the viewer in a static position some distance *outside* the field of vision; a positioning that discounts the moving eyes of actual binocular vision. Alberti's method, however, came to be conventionalised as a legitimate representation of the way we see. Furthermore, his system endorsed the disembodied 'gaze', over other more participatory and inclusive embodied modes of comprehension, as the definitive sense.[31]

[30] Alberti's treatise described a visual system based on exact measurements. Pictures were organised in three distinct layers (foreground, middle distance and background) placed parallel to the picture plane. Objects were organized around a clear and centrally positioned vanishing point with the axis running from the viewer's eye back into the space of the painting. This axis created visual continuity between the space in the painting and the space outside it.

[31] Although many modern social commentators have recognised vision as being part of a more complex visual system, the continual emphasis on ocular-centric comprehension has meant that the other senses have come to be considered secondary in our interaction

The objectivity, predicated by a detached viewpoint, separates subject from object and presupposes there is no connection between the viewer and the object of his gaze - the seen does not see back.[32] In viewing of the 'grand historical themes' of Western art this may be fine, but with respect to representations of the female nude such detachment is highly problematic. What is implicated within the tradition of the nude, established on the convention of the male creator with a female as the object of his creation, is

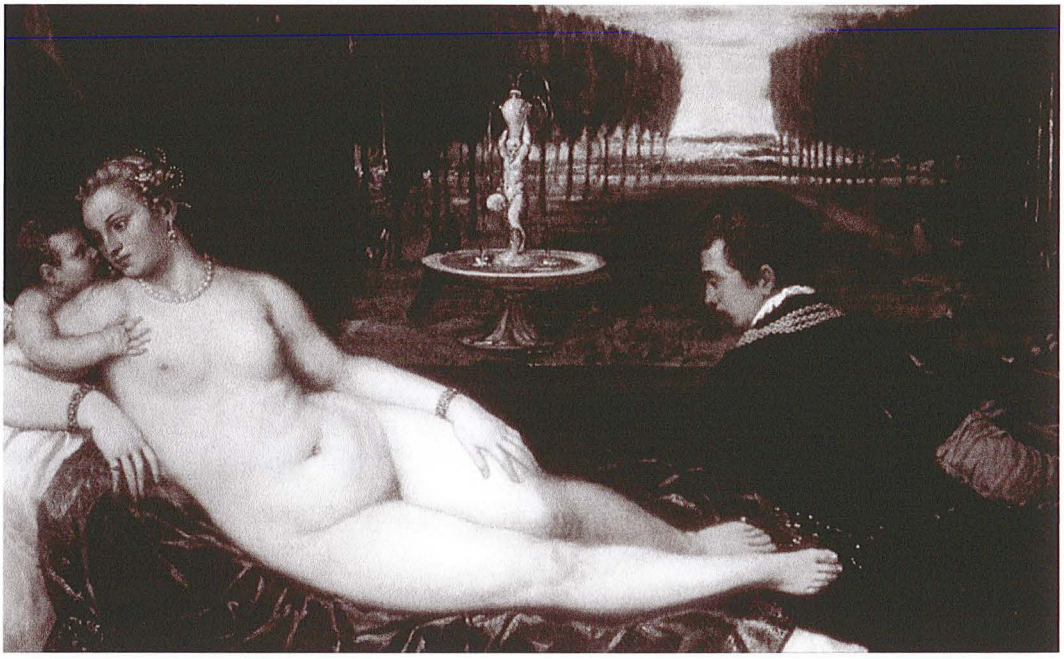

Fig 3. Titian, *Venus and Cupid*, c1550

with the phenomena of the world. For further discussion on the primacy of sight as the means of comprehending the world see **Jay**, Martin, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', p8 in **Foster**, Hal (ed) *Vision and Visuality*, Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Art, Number 2 Seattle: Bay Press, 1988 p3-23; **Gibson**, James, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Boston, London and Houghton: Mifflin, 1979; and **Merleau-Ponty** 'Eye and Mind', in **Ross**, Stephen (ed) *Art and its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994. For further information on how the ocular-centrism of perspectivalism has informed developments in painting see **Bryson**, Norman, *Vision and Painting: the Logic of the Gaze*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

[32] Rebecca Schneider writes "Perspective ... is reproduction of the 'actual', but it is also construction of that real - a delineation, through representation, of the defining characteristics of 'actuality' as relative to and marked by *distance* - distance as marked from an unremarked, unseen viewer". (**Schneider** 1997 p62.)

that vision is typically a male prerogative. He, the artist, *has* the vision whilst she, the female model, *is* the vision.[33] The objective positioning of perspectivalism promotes the spectator as voyeur; his gaze simultaneously denies the individuality of the naked subject, and, diminishes her to the status of desired object.[34]

Perspectivalism and the Visual Ideal

Over the ensuing centuries the belief in vision as the ultimate sense of knowing became increasingly entrenched. Its value to intellectual life was further endorsed by the rationalism of the Enlightenment era when sight became fully established as a central metaphor for the revealing of truth. It was believed that the enigmas of the world would be laid open through systematic visual and intellectual abstraction; a process requiring the paring back of all detail and complexity because particularity obscured the essential nature of things.[35] In art the value placed on abstraction led to the development of a hierarchy of standards that defined what were the primary aesthetic values over the ensuing centuries. As a model these standards embodied both the visual ideal and the formal means of achieving it. Upheld as fundamental to 'high' art were abstraction, sublimity, simplicity and unity; qualities through which the artist could best express the

[33] **Schneider** 1997 p67.

[34] The positioning of the artist as voyeur has meant that conventional depictions of the nude are usually referred to as 'keyhole' nudes.

[35] The writings of the seventeenth century philosophers Descartes and Locke embodied the belief in the abstracting methodologies as the primary means of ordering and controlling every aspect of intellectual and practical activity. In Descartian philosophy mental judgement and understanding are prevented, or interfered with, by excessive detail because such particularity keeps the mind from grasping larger outlines and wholes within the descriptive field. (**Brooks** 1987 p102.) Of interest was the increased attempt to master the body in systematic discourses principally founded on visual inspection. Michel Foucault in particular has traced the rise of the 'medical gaze' at the end of the eighteenth century. The clinic he demonstrates is a space for examining, comparing and classifying, practices that led to the development of a number of popular pseudo-scientific discourses claiming authority in "reading" the body: physiognomy, animal magnetism and phrenology. (**Brooks** 1987 p221.)

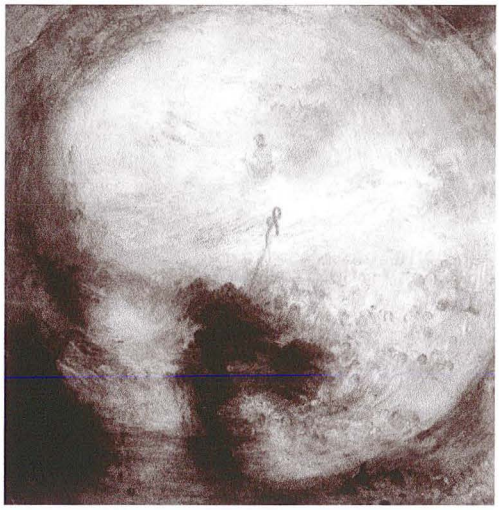

Fig 4. J. M. W. Turner, *Light and Colour After the Morning Deluge*, 1843

noblest achievements of mankind. Particularity and ornateness were to be avoided at all costs for these were considered to pollute "the canvas with deformity" and obstruct the "dynamic rush of the Imagination, fatigue the eye, and in the end induce anxiety rather than the elevating pleasures of the Sublime."[36] Support for these ideals was promoted through the writings of the influential art commentator, Sir Joshua Reynolds. He wrote:

> ... it is impossible for a picture composed of so many parts to have that effect so indispensably necessary to grandeur ... many little things will not make a great one. The Sublime impresses the mind at once with one great idea; it is a single blow ...[37]

Fig 5. Willem Claesz, *Still Life with Nautilus Goblet*, 1649

Reynolds' judgement on art that sanctioned 'lesser' qualities was simple; it was to be excluded from the domain of 'great' art. Dismissal on these grounds condemned the sumptuous style of Rococo art as 'laxest' and 'sophistic';[38] Dutch art for its inability to abstract itself from details;[39] and

[36] **Schor** 1987 p19.

[37] Reynolds quoted by **Schor** 1987 p146. Reynolds views were not isolated, most cultural commentators of the time sustained similar ideals.

[38] **Stafford**, Barbara, Maris *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Mit Press, 1991 p29.

[39] See **Alpers** 1989. Alpers claims that the appreciation of Dutch art of the 17th century has been subordinated to the hegemonic Cartesian model. She argues that the

the Venetian School of Italian painting for its 'sensual indulgences'.[40] Their exclusion however lay deeper than mere distaste for their formal frivolities, for what they all held in common was variation from the ideals upheld by Cartesian rationalism and perspectival clarity. Furthermore their exclusion on the basis of terminology such as 'laxest', 'sophistic', 'particular' and 'sensual' is also revealing. When compared to descriptions of the sublime as 'virile,' 'powerful,' 'manly' and 'dignified'; clearly other distinctions are at work.[41] What was considered 'great' art was evidently decided along gender

Cartesian model that privileges conceptual over perceptual looking fails to embrace the strategies of Dutch art. Rather than a monocular view that emphasises a gaze from afar, particular to perspective-based art, Alpers suggests that Dutch painting is an art of describing that requires scanning and close viewing. (**Jay** 1988 p25.) Rejecting the privileged role of the monocular subject, it emphasises instead a world of objects depicted on the flat canvas, indifferent to the beholder's position in front of it as the image is not contained entirely within the frame of the Albertian window but extends beyond it. (**Jay** 1988 p12.) The nonmathematical impulse of this tradition accords well with the indifference to hierarchy and proportion characteristic of perspectivalism. Instead it is concerned with descriptions of the fragmentary, detailed, and richly articulated surface of a world. Dutch art savours the discrete particularity of visual experience and resists the temptation to allegorise or explain what it sees. (**Jay** 1988 p13.) It is frequently remarked of Dutch paintings of this era, that there is nothing to be said about such pictures. The picture, it is argued, "shows exactly all that can be named; it brings all the names to the surface and its whole 'substance' seems to consist in that showy articulation of its surface or, more precisely, of the level of representation". (**Marin**, Louis, 'In Praise of Appearance', (trans **Miller**, Richard) p108 in *October* 37, Summer 1986, MIT Press, pp99-112.)

[40] The Venetian school of Italian painting (Titian, Veronese) was distinguished from its more 'serious' counterpart in Rome (Raphael, Michelangelo). Reynolds formed this distinction on the basis that the Venetian School privileged sensuality over reason, dazzle over affect, colour over line, ornament over severity. (**Schor** 1987 p19.)

[41] Reynolds uses the following words to describe the Sublime in art "rugged, strong, vast and powerful" whilst lesser forms of art are described as "small, smooth, ornamental, graceful and tender." The art literature of the period is littered with similar terminology. The following remark by Michelangelo is also interesting for the (gender) distinctions it makes between Dutch and Italian painting: "Flemish painting will please the devout better than any painting of Italy. It will appeal to women, especially the very old and the very young and also to monks and nuns and to certain noblemen who have no sense of harmony. In Flanders they paint with a view to external exactness or such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill ... this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skilful choice or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigour ... It is practically only the work done in Italy we can call true painting, and that is why we call good painting Italian." (**Michelangelo** quoted by **Schor** 1987 p20.)

lines for the terminology employed by Reynolds, and others, can equally be taken to be censure of the art of women. The transparent and arguable arbitrary division, between the serious domain of 'high' art (male) and the frivolities of ornamentation (female), has over time conventionalised the correlation between particularity and femininity as fact.[42]

The Persistence of Perspectivalism

As a model for revealing the world, the anti-sensual and ocular-centrism of Cartesianism, with its beginnings in perspectivalism, continued throughout

[42] These ideas were sustained through functionalist and formalist rhetoric of modernist discourse. In his widely quoted tract *Ornament and Crime* (1908) Adolf Loos argues that details disfigure the structural essence of true form. Particularities, he wrote, made art objects formally useless with such detailing indicating wasted labour and squandered material. He has been recorded as saying that anyone who would disfigure form with detail was culpable of performing "a crime against the national economy" because in fashioning ornaments "human labour, money, and material should thereby be ruined. The most unaesthetic decorated objects are those ... that demand hours of work." (Adolf Loos quoted by **Schor** 1987 p54.) Underlying the repeated link he makes between prolific ornamental detail and mass-produced objects lies the desire to maintain the separation between 'high' art objects and the artefacts of popular culture. Loos believed that through their endless reproduction and prodigious circulation mass-produced objects stood for all that classical ideals in art opposed. (**Schor** 1987 pp57-58) Loos' sentiments re-surfaced some decades later in the writings of influential late modernist critic Clement Greenberg who defined the aims of Modernism as the purification of each art - which is that "the conventions not essential to the viability of a medium be discarded as soon as they are recognised." In 1939 Greenberg also wrote of the need to defend avant-garde culture against the onslaught of the feminised and synthetic, kitsch culture which capitalism served up. (Greenberg quoted by **Pollock**, Griselda, 'Painting, Feminism, History' in **Barrett** Michèle and Anne **Phillips** (eds), p142, *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1992 pp138-176.) In his article entitled 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other', Andreas Huyssen argues that despite the new pluralised surface of post modernism, the historical endorsement of a hierarchical set of aesthetic standards determined along gender lines still resides as a powerful model within contemporary discourse. (Huyssen's article is discussed by **Pollock** in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992 p152.) He demonstrates the consistency with which recent critical aesthetic theory sustains the cultural division of the sexes through justifications based on a desire to preserve "true art against the diluting threat posed by popular art." (Huyssen quoted by **Pollock** in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992 p152.) Popular culture is referred to through 'feminine' terminology such as *engulfing*, *dangerous*, *trivial*, *easy*, while using 'masculine' terminology when referring to authentic or high culture. (Huyssen quoted by **Pollock** in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992 p152.)

Modernism and persists now. Many have argued otherwise, proclaiming that the objective and disembodied all-knowing eye of the Enlightenment was transfigured in early Modernism to an embodied subjective one. Although this shift has been widely taken up as indicating a break in perspectivalism, Jonathan Crary, amongst others, advises caution that this automatically indicates an absolute rupture with precedent models.[43] He argues instead for a re-configuration of vision that maintains the continuity of perspectivalism's fundamental tenet of the detached observer:

> the detachment, disembodiment, and objective distance of the early modern observer transfigured into the subjectification and ultimate dislocation of the nineteenth-century observer when vision became not a privileged form of knowing but itself "an object of knowledge, of observation". Nineteenth-century science explored the biological properties of sight, reattaching the biological body to the viewer and reattaching the viewing eye to the field of vision. But such science simultaneously rendered that eye dislocated (if not detached) from that which it sees by virtue of the viewer's own mind, interpreting that which falls upon his retina. The eye could no longer claim access to a 'real world' through perception. Vision became a ... phantasmic projection of the viewer's mind, dislocated from 'reality', composed of mechanised formal elements subject to the terms of the viewer's always already subjective perspective. This shift from disembodied, transcendental ... detachment to embodied subjective dislocation maintains a partial continuity with perspectivalism - a shift rather than an end.[44]

Within art, there have been many attempts to locate the demise of perspectivalism. Commentators have traced a seeming break in the reign of perspectival realism through the modernist painters' abstraction of the visual field. Again Crary suggests that abstraction in the arts is not such a radical break with the drive to realism as might be presumed. He argues: "some of the most pervasive means of producing 'realistic' effects in mass visual culture, such as the stereoscope, were in fact based on a radical abstraction

[43] Martin Jay also argues that, although perspectivalism has been vigorously contested in both philosophy and the visual arts, it would be foolish to say it has been driven from the field. (**Jay** 1988 p18.)

[44] Schneider paraphrasing Crary. (**Schneider** 1997 p69.)

and reconstruction of optical experience."[45] The process of abstraction of optical experience that inspired Modernist painters links "abstraction more with the positivist tenets of naturalism than with its demise."[46]

The shift that occurred in Modernism, that bought recognition to the subjective nature of vision, meant that the eye could no longer claim to reveal a 'real' world through objective and impartial observation. However, while it is possible to argue that the eye is embodied, in essence this transformation further dislocates the viewer from the visual field, rather than bringing him into close contact with it, because the scene is but a projection of the viewer's mind. This dislocation of the viewer from the viewed maintains continuity with perspectivalism and this has enduring implications for the representation of women's bodies. If dislocation has remained intact, the viewer remains uninvolved and "un(re)marked by the scene before him"[47] and:

> 'Woman', wherever we recognise her signs, rebounds with the cultural construction of desire as insatiable, a narrative linked to the feminization of the scopic field as open for possession.[48]

2. Representation: Factuality and Fiction

As previously discussed, in aesthetic terms detail is most frequently aligned with particularity; and particularity is most often associated with realistic pictorial representation. In searching for a definition of representation I came across Hal Foster's proposition that divides representation into two basic models: images that are attached to referents or *real things in the*

[45] Crary quoted by **Schneider** 1997 p193.

[46] **Schneider** 1997 p193.

[47] **Schneider** 1997 p70.

[48] **Schneider** 1997 p68.

world and those images that *represent other images.*[49] By way of examples, Foster places the former within late nineteenth century Realist painters' portrayals of everyday life; and the latter within the 'appropriated' images frequently utilised by the 1960s Pop artists. I was interested in Foster's differentiation between forms of representation, because I had been considering the stylistic differences between the various media I employed in the construction of my images. Initially within my paintings, and later through digital processes, I had been attempting to create an ambiguity between photographic, digital, and painted forms of representation, melding all within imagery but fully adopting none. I had been thinking about how the mimetic capacity of photography is at variance with the fabricated visual space of both digitally constructed and painted images; and Foster's differentiation between referential and so-called 'simulacral' images seemed analogous to these variations. Photography makes reference back to the actual world, but digital and painted images reflect traces of other images instead. By combining 'signage' of all three forms of representation I was attempting to create within my imagery a pictorial tension between factuality and fiction, mimesis and artifice. I felt that within this stylistic ambiguity lay the possibility of constructing representational pictures at variance with conventional pictorial arrangements.

To understand variations within realistic tendencies in painting, I read broadly. Initially at the centre of my curiosities were the highly illusionistic pictures of the seventeenth century Dutch Still Life painters; the portraits of the sixteenth-century Mannerist painter Bronzino; and the detailed and jewel-like paintings of Jan van Eyck. These works, however, proved of less direct interest to practical research than the pictures of two other painters working a century apart - the nineteenth century French painter Ingres and the 1960s Photo-Realist virtuoso, Richard Estes. The pictures of these two

[49] **Foster**, Hal, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996 p128.

artists revealed commonalities in that both artists employed a high degree of artifice within an over-riding structure of realism. This brings to their pictures readings that counter the principles of perspectivalism. I discuss Ingres' portraits paintings in detail in part three of this section. Estes' paintings are considered later in this part.

Realism as Philistinism

When Maurice Denis proclaimed in 1890 that a painting was essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order before it was a representation of anything, he echoed the belief that pictorial realism lay outside the primary concerns of art. Realism, in the sense of creating detailed and recognisable representations of visual experience, fought a losing battle for inclusion within the ranks of the avant-garde and historically has been relegated to the limbo of philistinism.[50] Distaste for detailed realism is exemplified in the slight regard commonly held for the Trompe L'oeil School, seventeenth century Dutch Painting and nineteenth century Realism.[51] Traditionally these styles have been considered as regressive because, with their penchant for detail, they are seen to refer back to the infancy of painting based in illusionistic mimicry; a beginning from which all 'progressive' art has long since endeavoured to remove itself.[52] The basis of this belief, as discussed previously, arises principally from the idea that to 'know' the world was to pare back details to reveal the essential

[50] **Marandel**, Patrice J. 'The Deductive Image', p38, in **Battcock**, Gregory (ed) *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology*, New York: E. P. Dutton 1975, pp36-48.

[51] Until relatively recently these schools have not been given the same scholarly attention awarded other historical developments within art.

[52] Linda Nochlin writes that Realism has often been relegated to "the limbo of philistinism ... it would seem that realism is indeed aside from the point, retardataire (s), or, at the very least, sentimentally revisionist." (**Nochlin**, Linda, 'Realism Now', in **Battcock** 1975 p113.) The comment back to the infancy of painting refers to the often quoted anecdote of the story of Zeuxis who, to the eternal embarrassment of art history, asked to have the curtain painted by Parrhasius lifted. (See **Schor** 1987 pp13-14.)

nature of the object under scrutiny. Painterly depictions of the particulars of ordinary life, as found in the pictures of Gustave Courbet and other nineteenth century Realists, epitomised, within their time, artless painting and the unmistakable sign of cultural disintegration of the sacred edifices of the ideal.[53]

The invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century was further to seal abstraction as of primary value within avant-garde circles. Relieved of

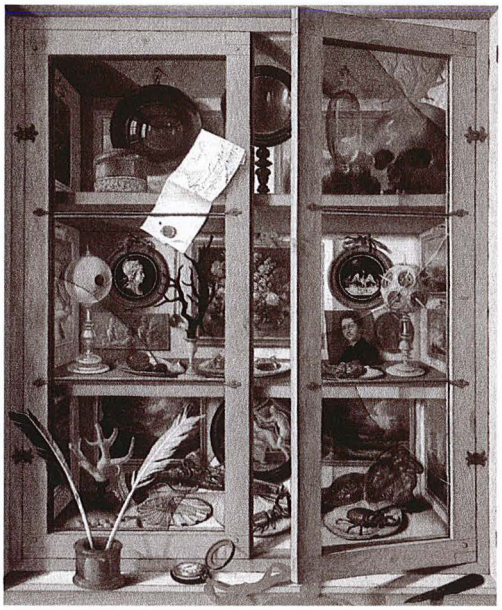

Fig 6. Domenico Remps, *Cabinet of Curiosities*, (detail), late C17th.

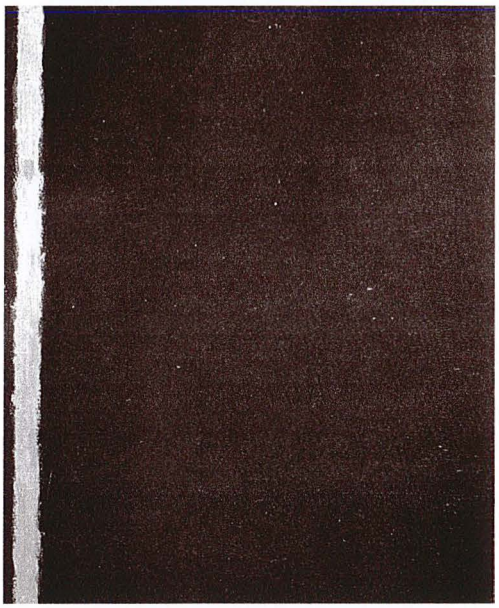

Fig 7. Barnett Newman, *Joshua*, (detail) 1950

any pretension to mimesis by the photographic image (be that an idealised imitation), artists abandoned any obligation to representation and concentrated on the aesthetic and formal qualities particular to the medium itself.[54] In the hundred years that followed, artists pushed art further and

[53] The desire to expunge ugly details even effected the pictorialism of the new photographic imagery. The characteristic of film to record all details was seen as an undesirable attribute by those involved in the widespread popularisation of photographic portraiture. Its increased use was paralleled by techniques of idealisation through retouching and erasing unsightly physiognomic blemishes. (**Schor** 1987 p49.)

[54] Modernism did in fact produce another stream of artistic practice that embraced

further away from realism. The desire to separate 'high' art from that of popular culture, which became increasingly tied to the photographic or reproduced image, led ultimately to the total reductionism of 1960s Formalist and Minimalist painting.[55] Like their nineteenth century forebears, these late modernist artists denigrated details as impurities that obscured the nature of true form. Illusionism was the antithesis of the belief in form as content, and only as content with no reference to the world beyond the painted surface.[56] The artist unconstrained by the need to assert anything in particular engaged only with the artistic self and with the processes and procedures of painting. Any semiotic references to the world were subsumed by the gestures created through the 'body' of the artist.[57]

Illusionism and Photorealism

In the face of the reductive tendencies of high formalism a group of artists, somewhat eccentrically, reintroduced representational subject matter. At the time the extraordinarily exacting illusionism of this art was startling; the

rather than denounced photography. Beginning with Picasso, through Dada, Futurism and Russian constructivism these artists incorporated found imagery within their pictures with increasing inventiveness. More concerned with concepts than with expressive painterly means they explored new pictorial forms through techniques such as collage and montage. However the aim of these artists was to raise fundamental questions about the *uniqueness* of the art object and the increasing mechanisation of everyday life. They were not concerned with representation as illusionism even though much of the found material was of photographic origin.

[55] Out of the desire to separate the concerns of art from popular culture has grown the legacy that using photographs as aids to art was somehow cheating or against the 'rules,' a prejudice that I still come across amongst students of art today.

[56] The concern of painting lay in the flat surface, the shape of the support and the properties of pigment. Clement Greenberg was one of the main players in the push for total reductionism.

[57] It needs to be noted that the abstract painters aimed to rid their painting of pictorial conventions such as left to right readings and illusionary space features particular to conventional pictorial representations. (Refer for example to Frank Stella's use of bilateral symmetry.) However, in their desire to reduce subject matter to the essential and universal, modernist painters continued to privilege abstraction as the ideal and as 'truth' whilst denigrating detail and ornateness as impurities.

impartiality with which artists methodically recorded the external world seemed to fly in the face of the unique gesture paramount to expressionism.[58] Like the paintings of Courbet and other nineteenth-century Realists, the pictures were considered by many within the art-world to indicate an aesthetic relapse and a repudiation of everything valued by art.[59]

The paintings of the Photo-Realists, as these new painters came to be called, were seen to be antithetical to art, because, not only did artists work directly from photographs, but they also pictured everything the camera recorded in its visual field. This was contrary to art because these artists neither ordered objects within a hierarchical pictorial space, nor did they abstract essentials by eliminating details and particulars. The Photo-Realist painters, in fact, seemed to revel in surface detail, and in painting each object with the same degree of clarity regardless of its positioning within the visual field. Moreover the methodologies developed by painters further indicated that this was their immediate intention. Many worked directly from photographs divided into grids, painting each part individually, section by section. Others worked systematically from projected slides, starting in one corner and progressively moving across the canvas. Both methods allowed artists to reproduce each part in isolation without reference to the context of the total image; a process that resulted in pictures of all-over clarity.

The methodologies developed by the Photo-Realists indicate that they were unconcerned with the structures of perspectival space or, as evidenced by the fact that they pictured the distortions produced by the camera lens, with recording the way we actually see. The framework of realism they adopted was simply that – a framework through which they could explore illusionism

[58] **Karp**, Ivan, 'Rent is the Only Reality, or the Hotel Instead of the Hymns' p27 in **Battcock** 1975 pp21-35.

[59] **Meisel**, Louis K. *Photo-Realism*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1981, p8.

as surface - a painting as a picture, and nothing else.[60] That these pictures are aesthetic statements about appearance is further evidenced by the fact that despite all pretensions to depth illusionism, most Photo-Realist paintings are notably flat. Frequently the greatest sense of pictorial depth appears in the foreground through reflections on planes of glass, mirrors, shiny metal, stainless steel and chrome. Reflections are more likely to record what is beyond the picture than adding to the sense of pictorial depth.[61] This form of 'inverted' pictorial space compelled Louis Meisel to comment: "The recurrent emphasis on reflective surface reveals a desire to make paintings so flat that they are, in a way, inside out."[62]

The Paintings of Richard Estes

Of the artists working within Photo-Realism, Richard Estes stands apart for his paramount virtuosity. I am particularly drawn to his paintings of reflections in shop-front windows. The pictorial illusionism in these paintings appears, at first glance, extraordinarily convincing. Closer inspection, however, reveals that these depictions have little to do with real seeing. The more we try to make logical sense of them the more perplexing they become. Objects in the background, mid-ground and foreground intersect with reflections of objects not actually in the picture's frame.[63]

[60] Ironically, in their desire for their pictures to be paintings and nothing else, the Photorealists paralleled the Formalists belief in form as content. So in many ways their aims could be considered as similar, rather than totally subversive, to that of their peers.

[61] This spatial organisation is subversive to conventional illusionism because the greatest sense of pictorial depth occurs within the foreground. Perspectivalism works from the principle of all objects receding from the front of the picture plane.

[62] **Meisel** 1981 p11.

[63] Estes added more glass and polished reflective surfaces to his paintings than could be found in the slide from which he worked. Pictorial depth not only relies on visual organisation but also on the principle that as objects recede in space they loose texture, detail and intensity of colour, a phenomenon recorded by Leonardo da Vinci as atmospheric perspective.

Fig 8. Richard Estes, *Central Savings*, 1975

Fig 9. Richard Estes, *Thom McAn*. 1974

Pictorial depth dissolves as the visual clutter merges into one impenetrable surface lying parallel to the front of the picture plane. Our look can not penetrate behind this pictorial mélange.

The copious detail, within Estes' paintings, not only affects the spatial information necessary to make sense of these pictures, but its excess brings to his paintings a hyper-reality that also has little to do with actual seeing. It introduces to his paintings what Susan Stewart has described as "the unreal effect of the real."[64] Stewart explains that: "to describe more than is necessary" is to "describe in a way that interrupts the everyday hierarchical organisation"[65] of actual vision.[66] The excess of information, and the all-over equal treatment of parts, in Estes' pictures, brings to them an intense crispness that has little to do with either real seeing or the organising principles essential to perspectivalism.

Despite the artist's transparent and methodical approach, and the cool impartiality suggested by his pictures, these paintings are not simply

[64] **Stewart**, Susan, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993 p27.

[65] **Stewart** 1993 p27.

[66] Human vision works through a selective focus that excludes as unnecessary, those details of unconcern for the comprehension of what is perceived.

Fig 10. J. A. D. Ingres, *Bather of Valpinçon*, 1808

concerned with picturing or mimicking the 'real' world. The expectations they set up by our initial register of them as factual representations are overturned by their visual inconsistencies. Their intricate pictorialism brings to the fore complex questions about the relationship between representation, illusionism and artifice. The tension between artifice and realism, and the dissolving of depth allusion into pure surface, are of interest to my project. It is these features that I also find intriguing within the painter Ingres. However, whereas visual discrepancies between artifice and realism and two and three dimensions within Estes' pictures, may make us *think* about illusionism, similar features within Ingres' paintings bring them a strangeness that is *emotionally* both fascinating and unsettling. Ingres, no doubt, was very much a product of his era, yet his portraits of society women suggest that for these pictures he worked outside the conventions of his time. It is to him that I now turn.

3. Contradiction: The Portrait Paintings of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

My first encounter with a painting by Ingres[67] was in the Louvre, Paris in 1990. My wanderings were brought to a halt by a picture of a naked figure

[67] Born 1755; died 1867.

her back stretching the length of the picture plane. The quiet formal reticence of the painting distinguished it from others surrounding it. I had seen it in books, of course, but the aura emanating from the image caught me by surprise. The reproduced image imparted nothing of the hypnotic and captivating presence that drew me towards and into this painting. My seduction stemmed from conflicting emotions that flowed within me. The flesh of the naked bather, for the painting was Ingres' *Bather of Valpinçon*, (1808), was alluring in its polished porcelain-like, finish; yet it was somewhat chilly in its glassy perfection and bluish tinge, and the figure, although seductive in her nakedness, was self-absorbed and unavailable. The alluring silence that had initially captivated me felt brittle and tense as I moved into close proximity.

The peculiar and contrary presence of this picture instilled within me a passion for Ingres' art. Although his odalisque, bather and harem paintings initially captivated me, it was his portraits of nineteenth-century French society women that subsequently became the source of a long-term fascination. Not only do these pictures possess a similar compelling oscillation between sensuality and detachment but, with their rich surface patterns and meticulous registration of textural variation, they also satiate my appetite for detail.

My enchantment with Ingres' portraits of women, however, has not come unencumbered: it is tempered by the peculiarity of his figures. They are strangely distorted in the interests of sensuality, and this makes them highly questionable to my feminist leanings. For, as Carol Ockman has elucidated in her impressive dissertation, equally compelling as the relation between distortion and pleasure, is the affinity between distortion and horror.[68]

[68] **Ockman**, Carol, *Ingres Eroticised Bodies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995 p3. Ockman has documented the way in which Ingres' pictures of women, whether as subject for portraiture, as nude bather or odalisque, assume the passive submissiveness of the eroticised female body. Ockman deals specifically with the issues of sexual discourses that have always paralleled the reception of the serpentine line in Ingres work.

Ingres' boneless and pliant figures reduced to the sensual are offensive and distasteful to women. The disparity I experience between my seduction by these pictures and the distasteful assumptions encapsulated within them increased my desire to understand them more fully. I felt that within the complex formal structure of Ingres' pictures lay possibilities for my own explorations into picturing subjectivity.

Detail, Spatial Compression and Distortion

For most writers, Ingres' paintings seem to be caught midway between two ostensibly antagonistic aesthetic convictions - the ideals of Romanticism and the moral imperatives of Neo-classicism. That his painting can reflect these opposing styles in equal measure indicates only one of many discrepancies that exist within his art. Disparate readings of artifice and realism, realism and distortion, detail and abstraction, sensuality and detachment, elicit simultaneous responses of pleasure and disgust, enjoyment and horror, and fascination and repulsion. Such incongruous readings elicit acclaim and dislike in equal measure.[69]

Added to the contrary nature of his art was the devotion Ingres felt within himself to history painting and his practice, by necessity, of portraiture. He considered portraiture as lesser subject matter than the grand but well-rehearsed historical themes.[70] Yet despite this Ingres brought to his

[69] Artists and critics alike have deplored his lack of spontaneity and his carefully rendered style that makes so apparent his love of surfaces, details, and "the curiosities and minutiae of modern life." (**Ribeiro**, Aileen, *Ingres in Fashion: Representations of Dress and Appearance in Ingres' Images of Women*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999 p2.) Correspondingly there are many others who have admired Ingres' abilities in rendering, his obsession with surface, his use of decorative colour and his "appreciation of the sensual." (**Ribeiro** 1999 p2.)

[70] In this belief Ingres reflected the conventional rhetoric of the period with its commitment to the hierarchy of genres. Ingres has been recorded as saying of one of his female subjects "How I suffer painting this dressed up-monkey." (T. Silvestre quoted in **Ribeiro** 1999 p22.) But the consistently high quality of his portraits suggests that he could not have despised them anywhere near as much as he claimed.

portraits a psychologically complex intensity rarely seen and certainly seldom surpassed within the genre.[71] Free from academic constraints of official styles, Ingres was able within his portraits to fully express his autonomy and originality as an artist.[72]

Fig 11. J. A. D. Ingres, *Madame Moitessier*, 1856

A distinguishing and central characteristic of Ingres' portrait paintings is his passion for detail. But widespread distaste for particularity within art meant it was for this that the artist was most frequently denounced.[73] Ingres' aspiration "to account for the entire visual domain"[74] through the intricacies of surface pattern was considered contrary to the ideals of high classical painting. His preoccupation with externals, clothing and accessories was considered contrary to the soul and intellect of painting. Baudelaire decried Ingres' emphasis on detail, suggesting that

[71] The portraits of the Italian Mannerist painter Bronzino are amongst the very few that rival the intensity of those painted by Ingres. In their complex structure and technical accomplishment Bronzino's portraits display a controlled and unsettling realism similar to that found in the work of Ingres.

[72] This was at variance with his approach to history painting. In depicting the grand historical themes Ingres followed the academic line that demanded abstention from painterly pleasure and the "suppression of everything that might be threatening to the rigorous demands of being modern and at the edge of time." (Huyssen quoted by **Pollock** in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992 p152.)

[73] Ingres' pupil Amaury-Duval wrote of this in his article in 'L'Artiste' from 1856. (**Ribeiro** 1999 p16.)

[74] **Schor** 1987 p42.

such concentration came at the expense of the harmonious whole[75] and Silvestre denounced what he called the "tyranny"[76] of Ingres' obsession with details. Thus, while more recently some have written that detail brought to the painter's pictures a "magical intensity,"[77] the majority of his peers objected to the exaggerated precision with which he painted "each hair ... each thread of silk ... each brooch and bracelet."[78] While it may be construed that Ingres' love of particularity indicated aspirations to reproduce the 'real', its visual profusion counters the effect of realism. Ingres' obsession for recording every detail, no matter how insignificant, brings to his portraits the same sense of heightened reality - the unreal effect of the real - as we find in Richard Estes' paintings, which also set out to account for the entire visual domain.[79] With their enhanced surface effects, Ingres' pictures are more indicative of statements about appearance than accurate representations of reality.

Ingres' portraits indicate that the artist was more concerned with surface effects and appearance than with recording accurately what is in front of

[75] Baudelaire was one of Ingres most persistent critics. His writings on Ingres make clear his distaste for the artist's detailed style and distorted anatomy. However Baudelaire contradicted himself on occasion and assailed those who thought Ingres' painting ordinary. With reference to several portraits exhibited at the Bazar Bonne Nouvelle in 1846, Baudelaire wrote: "Open your eyes, you nation of boobies, and tell us if you ever saw such dazzling, eye-catching painting, or even a greater elaboration of colour." These paintings he went on to say were "real portraits ..." (Quoted in **Ribeiro** 1999 p18.)

[76] Silvestre quoted by **Ribeiro** 1999 p25.

[77] **Rosenblum**, Robert, *Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1967 p32.

[78] Silvestre quoted by **Ribeiro** 1999 p25.

[79] Ingres' highly detailed style also brings to mind the descriptive but artificial realism of early Flemish paintings and the portraits of the Italian Mannerist painter Bronzino. Van Eyck's descriptions of hair, heavily woven oriental carpets, crisp folds of satin brocades and translucent glass have a mesmerising clarity about them. In Bronzino's paintings we observe forms conceived wholly for their surface effect - its illusionism is so excessive that the painting often appear unnatural. Of interest is that the paintings of both artists compel the viewer to oscillate between a distant position and many positions close their surfaces.

Fig 12. J. A. D. Ingres, *Madame Rivière*, 1806

Fig 13. J. A. D. Ingres, *Madame Panckoucke*, 1811

him. His attention to detail means that all objects, regardless of their positioning within the pictorial space, are rendered with the same degree of clarity. Visually this creates a flattening effect. As forms swell to gain visual prominence within an equal field, the space surrounding them seems to be forced out and figure and ground become almost inseparable. As distinction between two and three dimensions becomes confused, the illusion of realism breaks down.[80] Our gaze can penetrate no further than the shallows of the rich exterior surface pattern, a surface that seems to arrest his subjects, pressing them against the picture plane so they appear unable to move let alone breathe.[81] We are incapable of achieving the clarity

[80] I also looked at this effect in the drawings of Klossowski. In his works the figures also seem to be caught between two and three dimensions. They indicate form but are flattened, lack volume, and are located in strangely ambiguous spaces. To increase the effect of a flattened pictorial space, and contracted forms, Klossowski often employs a low and close-up viewpoint that pushes his figures closer to the front of the picture plane. With little sense of depth the viewer is left instead to read the picture through its surface patterns, details and linear arabesques.

[81] We can observe this effect within the standing portrait of *Mme Moitessier* (1851). In

necessary to readings of realism, our gaze repelled by the impenetrable and claustrophobic space.[82]

The prominence of surface pattern is accentuated by Ingres' infamous serpentine line that winds sinuously and independently across the picture plane. Its visual persistence over-rides spatial indicators of light, space and modelled form - its autonomy fashioning limbs, hands, necks and breasts into distortions that are amongst the most famous in the history of art.[83]

the picture she stands erect against a magenta damask wall. The contracted space between the front of the picture and the wall behind almost denies her corporeality. And the intensity of her black lace dress silhouetted against the wall further reinforces this two-dimensional effect. The constriction of the space seems so great that even the modelling of her shoulders becomes heraldic.

[82] This effect reaches its height within Ingres' three mirror portraits – those of *Vicomtesse de Senonnes*(1816), *Comtesse d'Haussonville* (1845), and *Madame Moitessier* (seated, 1856). Norman Bryson proposes that Ingres included a mirror in these pictures to deliberately disrupt the synthesis of two and three dimensions vital to the cohesion of perspectival space. (**Bryson** 1984 p166.) He bases his argument on the fact that the reflections in the mirrors provide the viewer with conflicting versions of the external image. For example in the picture of the Vicomtesse the head of his sitter looks out and slightly up whilst the reflected image tilts forward and down. Likewise in the portrait of *Comtesse d'Haussonville* the mirrored image seems to reflect a different person, of different height and with a different hairstyle. Further fractures are evident in certain objects that seem unable to reflect (the central jardiniere and the binoculars in the portrait of the Comtesse) while other objects seem to exist only in their reflection (the white tulip in the same portrait). (**Bryson** 1984 p167.) The discrepancy between the real and reflected image is most notable in the portrait of *Mme Moitessier*. The fingers of her hand are open whilst in the reflection we observe her hand as a clenched fist and the angle of her head in no way resembles that shown in the mirror. As viewers we need to occupy at least two positions (at eye level with her and facing her and to the far right) to try and make sense of the picture. (**Bryson** 1984 p174.) Neither the two-dimensional virtual image nor the three-dimensionality of the subject can adequately account for the painting's space.

[83] That their creation is deliberate is evident in the frequency with which they occur. Many art historians have searched for reasons why Ingres employed such overt distortions. Their recurrence provides a powerful contradiction to Ingres' desire for perfection. Marjorie Cohn has explored Ingres' need for perfection through his repeated revision of canvases through copying and tracing. Ingres showed himself willing upon the completion of a particular work to straight away start on another version of the same composition. In her essay Cohn argues that Ingres' self-repetition cannot be treated either as an aberration having no real connection with his work, or as a symptom of artistic decline. She proposes that Ingres' obsession with repetition must be seen as a meaningful activity - that is the pursuit of perfection. (**Cohn**, Marjorie B. 'In Pursuit of Perfection', in **Edelstein**, Debra, (ed) *In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of*

Writings on Ingres remain incomplete without references to pliant boneless flesh and attenuated anatomies of tapered necks, limbs and fingers. While most frequently discussed in relation to the extra vertebra and impossible leg of *Le Grande Odalisque*, (1814), the anatomical incongruities of Ingres' portraits are also conspicuous.[84] The artist's willingness to deform his subjects in the interests of an aesthetic advantage repeats itself time and again. His subjects succumb to the most astonishing distortions in order that they might conform to the demands of the flattened pictorial space and the abstract contours that inscribe its surface.[85]

Sensuality and Detachment

Ingres' serpentine line is of interest to most writers for its links to sensuality; central to its discussion are the words soft, fleshy, pliant and melting. But repeated deliberation on the quality of line as a key indicator of sensuality has meant that the equally seductive tactility suggested through his attention to surfaces is often overlooked. The same heightened lucidity that conveys a sense of hyper-reality also brings life to silk, plush, velvet, fur and feathers. As these erotic fabrics brush against polished flesh they record and intensify

J-A-D Ingres, Kentucky: J.B. Speed Art Museum Publication in association with Indiana University Press, 1983 pp10-33.) Of his repetitions Ingres himself wrote: "The great number of those works, which I love because of their subject, have, it has seemed to me, been worth my while making better either by re-doing them or by retouching them. When through his love of art or through hard work an artist may hope to leave his name to posterity, he can never do enough to make his paintings more beautiful or less perfect (s)." (**Delaborde**, Henri, quoted in **Wollheim**, Richard, *Painting as an Art*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987 p250). Given that Ingres strove for perfection it would seem most likely that he employed distortions for both sensual and aesthetic purposes although Ingres himself has been recorded as saying that he used distortions as a means of 'correcting nature on her own terms'.

[84] As examples see the neck and bosom of *Madame Panchoucke* (1811); the excessive length of the left arm of *Madame Devauçay* (1807); the gaucheness of the folded arm of *Comtesse d'Haussonville*; the awkward shoulder joint of *Madame Rivière* (1806); bizarre body of *Vicomtesse de Senonnes*; and the hands of *Madame Moitessier* (1856) whose boneless fingers echo the infamous sub-aquatic hand of Ingres' painting of Thetis.

[85] **Rosenblum** 1967 p70.

Fig 14. J. A. D. Ingres, *Princess de Broglie*, 1853

the sense of touch; their tactility augmented by the sense of sound. One can almost hear the whispering of materials as the sitter stirs - the susurration of silk, the muffle of velvet and the crispness of satin.[86] However, while some have lauded his sensuality, there are equally those who have found his art passionless. In combination, the painter's precise style and palette of cool, mercurial tones of silvery grays and chilly blues that "congeals the blush of real flesh,"[87] has made generations of observers describe his paintings as indifferent and inaccessible. Félix Nadar and Charles Baudelaire were both moved to write that Ingres' art was so 'cold' it reminded them of death.[88] Charles Laborieu labelled Ingres "the artist

[86] **Ribeiro** 1999 p132. For a detailed semiotic reading of the senses in Ingres' art see **Connolly**, John L. Jr. 'The Erotic Intellect', in **Hess**, Thomas B. and Linda **Nochlin**, (eds) *Woman as Sex Object*, London: Allen Lane 1973, pp 17-31. Ingres' interest in conveying the senses through detail reflects much literature of the period. Many authors revelled in describing their subjects in great detail paying particular attention to sound, smell and taste. For example, in Flaubert's novel *A Sentimental Education* the hero Frédéric Moreau records his obsession with an unattainable love by noting the details of her dress and appearance. He loved the swishing noise made by her dress as she passed through a doorway, or the slight slapping sound made by the flounces of her skirt brushing against his legs as he walked arm-in-arm with her. He is obsessed by the scent of her handkerchief, and "for him her comb, her gloves, her rings were something utterly special, as remarkable as any work of art, possessing a personality of their own that was almost human." **Flaubert** G. *A Sentimental Education*, London, 1989 pp61-75 quoted in **Ribeiro** 1999 p175.

[87] **Rosenblum** 1967 p54.

[88] Quoted by **Ockman** 1995 p85.

gravedigger" remarking that his odalisques "all smelled like corpses"[89] and G. Pierre likewise described the flesh of Ingres' figures as "of a purplish-blue ivory colour; neither veins, arteries, nor nervous system lies beneath."[90] The pervasive sense of death is reiterated in comments that record distaste for the formlessness of Ingres' subjects. Baudelaire felt that their amorphous fluidity made them only half-human.[91] His allusion echoed in comments that describe Ingres' figures as "white bloodsuckers"[92] and as "light air-balloons,"[93] "blown up by some soft, inanimate substance, foreign to the human organism."[94] Together these comments suggest Ingres' art "was a deadly art comprised of monstrous bodies."[95]

Abjection within the Painting of Ingres

That his art can evoke such passionate responses, whether in delight of its sensuality or in derision of its coldness, suggests that the power of his works lies *within* the dual readings of sensuality and death, beauty and disgust. While most writers on his art discuss these features in contrary terms, Carol Ockman's proposal of their interconnectedness offers the most interesting and relevant thesis for my project. Through an analysis of sensuality and death within the painter's art, she argues for the *mutual* relationship between pleasure and horror. She proposes that it is within this coupling that we can locate the physical dimensions of the abject.[96] She argues that like

[89] **Ockman** 1995 p85.

[90] **Ockman** 1995 p96.

[91] **Ockman** 1995 p96.

[92] **Sand, George** quoted by **Ockman** 1995 p98.

[93] **Mantz, Paul** quoted by **Ockman** 1995 p97.

[94] Baudelaire quoted by **Ockman** 1995 p98.

[95] **Ockman** 1995 p97.

[96] Ockman draws upon Julia Kristeva's conception of abjection as a crucial text for understanding the powerful evocations of pleasure and horror informing the criticism of Ingres' paintings. (**Ockman** 1995 p101.)

abjection itself, Ingres' pictures elicit both repulsion and seduction through their associations with "the sensual, the soft, the formless, and the feminine."[97] Underlying Ockman's thesis is the implication that it is the physical nature of these bodies that is at issue. With their intensely material presence, Ingres' bodies fail to conform to the specific kind of ideal female body that convention required. The parallel experiences of horror and pleasure entangle the viewer within an intricate sensory relationship. The viewer experiences the extremes of fear and reassurance in parallel with each other rather than successively. This creates a profound physical anxiety, because although sensual in their formal demands, in their "all-too-fluid boundaries distinguishing the ideal from the sensual, life from death",[98] Ingres' bodies come perilously close to having a power that emasculates.[99]

It is unlikely that the destabilisation of the ideal beauty, for which he and his contemporaries strove, was deliberate or intentional on Ingres' part. That his pictures created the responses that they did suggests that his art functioned transgressively within its time and it is this point that makes his work of interest to practitioners today. Ockman proposes that the abject is useful to contemporary practitioners concerned with picturing sexual difference, suggesting that fluidity has the potential to destabilise when seen,

[97] **Ockman** 1995 p109.

[98] **Ockman** 1995 p110. Perceived as a threat to identity itself, abjection is described by Kristeva as that which the symbolic must either discard or control. "Not only does it beckon the subject ever closer to its edge, the abject also insists on the subject's necessary relation to death, corporeality, animality, and materiality, concepts intolerable to consciousness and reason." (**Ockman** 1995 p87.) For Kristeva the corpse represents the "utmost of abjection" for "it is death infecting life." (**Kristeva** quoted by **Ockman** 1995 p98.)

[99] **Ockman** 1995 p97. Responses of disgust applied equally to female and male, heroic and mythological bodies. At issue was the profound crisis of confidence concerning the representation of the male body, an anxiety promoted by bodies no matter what their sex. Ingres' bodies - either too muscled or too soft - violated notions of both the feminine and the masculine. (**Ockman** 1995 p108.)

not as formlessness but as form that threatens to defy boundaries.[100] In her articulation of the abject as a possible avenue through which to picture sexual difference, Ockman recapitulates various transgressive strategies that, throughout the past decade, have been adopted and developed as languages through which women can explore issues of subjectivity. Ockman's proposition is important to my project in that it offers an approach to representing female subjectivity at variance to conventional depictions of the female nude. I am interested in the tactile quality and palpable intensity conveyed by Ingres' pictures; these have the potential to disrupt the disembodied viewpoint through the sensory demands they place on the viewer.

4. The Question of Media: Painting and Gender

J. Bedingfield's painting *Le Modèle s'amuse*, (c1890), depicts a woman touching up the surface of a sculptured bust with a paintbrush. Closer examination reveals that the sculpture is a representation of the woman herself. In looking at her modelled self the woman is locked into a continuous cycle of reflection, a cycle which entirely determines her presence within it. The creator of the painting, a male artist, (as is also, by association, the maker of the sculpture), is outside representation in a position of voyeur. The woman, his creation, does not re-present herself but with the brush only decorates and embellishes her sculptured image. The woman "cannot by this measure be an artist; she can only amuse herself with the replica of herself produced - as the discourse of masculine creativity insists - by the absent male artist."[101]

[100] Works by artists referring to the concepts of abjection theories form a large part of contemporary art practice. With representations of the exterior body of concern, artists are seeking other ways of picturing the body through representations of the internal and fluid body.

[101] **Pointon**, Marcia, 'Reading The Body: Historiography and the Case of the Female

Fig 15. J. Bedinfield,. *Le Modèle S'Amuse*, 1890

This picture reflects the historical positioning of the artist/painter as male. The act and language of painting has conventionally been associated with men. Its script has both served their fantasies and represented their dominance.[102] This precedent, of course, has been challenged in recent decades - it is easier for women today to be taken seriously both as artists and as painters. Yet for women working within painting there *are* continuing problems because the historical positioning of painting as a male activity remains as a still powerful model within contemporary memory. This has made, and continues to make, it difficult for women to constitute a critical practice within the discipline. For those women artists who wish to explore aspects of female embodiment in paint this problem is further complicated. With the domain of the representation of women also traditionally colonised

Nude', in **Pointon**, Marcia, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 p29.

[102] **Pollock** p161 in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992.

by men there is barely room to manoeuvre within the existing order. Unfortunately, feminism itself has done little to assist with this problem. Feminist theories of the male gaze and a general mistrust in representation,[103] has meant that painting historically based in both, has been forsaken by a preference for photo-text and site-specific art, such as performance and installation art. This has left painting out of favour and out on a limb. In recent decades, painting has been one of the most ignored areas for creative expression by women practitioners, and for feminist theoretical discourse alike.

Painting and Gender

> What there are now, after feminism's long march ... are more and more top women sculptors, photographic artists, and artists of installation and performance ... But no truly great painters. Is it biology? The very suggestion seems sexist, but what if it happens to be true? A theory lately in the air holds that male eroticism is concentrated in the sense of sight, whereas for women the erotic is distributed more evenly among the five senses. That would make painting the medium of maximum physical control over the visual, naturally more intense in its pleasures for men than for women.[104]

The above statement reveals the continued assertions of painting as a male domain. Its declaration also highlights the enduring connection of painting

[103] Feminist deconstruction and psychoanalytic theory made representation highly suspect because representational imagery was considered the primary means through which symbolism could maintain sexual difference and gender stereotypes of patriarchal discourse. Throughout the eighties artists mostly 'appropriated' representational imagery as the means of exposing and criticising the mechanisms of representation and its underlying assumptions. (As examples refer to the early photo-texts of Barbara Kruger and the film stills of Cindy Sherman) Representation, along with subjectivity came to be considered to be "bad things." (**Foster** 1996 p 127.) In 'appropriation art' "its guise of representation ... is not ... troubled by the real nor much altered by the subject (artist and viewer are given little agency in this work)." (**Foster** 1996 p146.)

[104] This comment by Peter Schjeldahl recalls the classical hierarchical organisation that differentiates between particular modes of visual experience based upon gender categorisations. **Schjeldahl** quoted by **Broude** Norma and Mary K. **Garrard**, (eds) *The Power of Feminist Art: Emergence, Impact and Triumph of the American Art Movement*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994 p257.

with masculine erotic gesture and the equation of masculinity with the sense of sight. The analogy of the canvas as the empty but receptive surface, inscribed and given phallic meaning by the (male) artist is one of the founding metaphors of modern painting.[105] It would appear from the above statement made in 1990, decades *after* the decline of Modernism, that the capacity for painting to break free from its history as a privileged medium of masculinity remains limited. Schjeldahl's comment confirms the continuing belief of the link between high art, painting, men, sexuality, bodily gesture, sight and truth.

The problem for women entering the domain of painting lies within this historical positioning. Pressures, relating to how their works have been received, have ensured that very few women make a name for themselves within the field. The historical exclusion of women from painting stretches from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when women were excluded from the academies on the grounds of their femininity, through Modernism and into recent decades.[106] After their early exclusion from the art academies, the twentieth century seemingly offered to women increasing independence and an apparent liberation to join the ranks of the avant-

[105] For example accounts by the critic Peter Fuller describe a painting by the artist Robert Natkin as: " ... undeniably saturated with a vibrant sensuality: it is attractive almost in a sexual sense. As you look, you are aware of the apparent unity of this seemingly seamless skin of light. You are compelled to confront it as a whole; your eyes caress and explore it horizontally and vertically almost like hands moving across another's body." (Fuller quoted in **Betterton**, Rosemary, *An Intimate Distance, Women Artists and the Body*, London and New York: Routledge 1996, p80.) The allusions Fuller makes between the skin of the canvas and the female body are further echoed in other stereotypical feminine phrases employed in his article: "shamelessly beguiling ... the intimately sensual pinkness of white flesh ... alluring, suspended cloth ... seamless skin" and "infinite recessive interior space." (**Betterton** 1996 p80.) Underlying Fuller's comments is the implication that, for the critic, the painting is metaphorically female and a substitution for the artist's, and by extension, his own, sexual desire.

[106] The swing back to painting that occurred in the mid-eighties, after its 'banishment' in the preceding decade, once again saw painting dominated by a bevy of all male art-stars. Susan Rothenburg, Terese Oulton and Ida Applebroog were amongst the relatively few women whose work was exhibited alongside their male peers.

garde. Yet it was a doubtful victory because obliquely, through its institutions and critical discourses, Modernism defended the boundaries of masculine hegemony and in reality only further served to re-inscribe that gender's privilege. What was offered to women was participation in Modernism on the condition that they erased their gender particularity.[107] To have access to the profession women were expected to deny their gender by becoming 'one of the boys'.[108] Any hint of sexual difference in her work meant the artist was condemned for those very same aspects because being a woman meant that aesthetically the work was discussed solely in terms of the 'feminine' qualities it revealed, not for its contributions to art.[109]

The difficulty women face in gaining serious critical acclaim for their painting is exemplified in reviews of a retrospective exhibition of the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe.[110] As with reviews written about her work when it was initially exhibited in the early 1920s, commentary arising from her retrospective wove the imagery of her paintings together with her sexuality.[111] It was observations of this kind that caused O'Keefe to

[107] **Pollock** p151 in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992.

[108] Under this arrangement many women artists either signed their art with their initials only, or de-feminised their names such as in the case of the artist Lee Krasner.

[109] In her book *The Art of Reflection*, Marsha Meskimmon wrote "For women artists, most of the avant-garde groups of the twentieth century have been difficult to infiltrate in any significant way. The groups were decidedly masculine asserting their powerful cultural marginality (s) through sexually dominating postures of maleness and concepts of artistic creativity to which women could not subscribe. For the most part, women artists attained only limited roles in such artists' groups; they were the models, lovers, students, muses and supporters of the male artists." **Meskimmon** 1996 p39.

[110] Hayward Gallery, London 1993. Eva Hesse, Meret Oppenheim and Louise Bourgeois are further examples of artists whose works have frequently been discussed in terms of their feminine symbolism. Their contributions to the broader developments of modernist art remain obscured. The omission of Helen Frankenthaler's contributions to Modernism is of note; as one of the pioneers of colour field painting her innovations are rarely acknowledged. Her explorations into staining unprimed canvas (certainly known about but unacknowledged by Greenberg) preceded the works of Morris Louis and others, yet the development of the technique is attributed, by Greenberg, to Louis. (See **Pollock** p162 in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992.)

[111] The assessment of O'Keefe's work has in the main come from male critics.

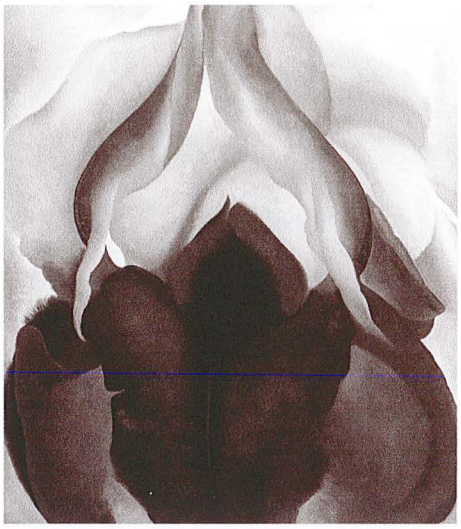

Fig 16. Georgia O'Keefe, *Black Iris*, 1926

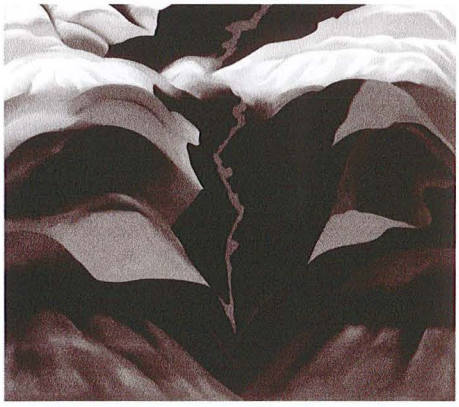

Fig 17. Georgia O'Keefe, *Black Place III*, 1944

withdraw from public life and undergo a total re-assessment of the direction of her art in the mid 1920s.[112] The dramatic change in the content of her imagery from this period can be directly attributed to O'Keefe's desire to rid her paintings of the feminised readings, that critics, habitually applied to her semi-abstract flower paintings. As with other women artists of her era, O'Keefe felt the need to down play all references to sexuality in order that her work would be evaluated on the same grounds as that of her male peers. Unfortunately, however, O'Keefe's desire that her paintings be reviewed for their wider contributions to art has never come to pass. On the one hand, her flower pictures have been discussed almost exclusively in feminised terms, and on the other her landscapes have invariably been dismissed outright, as commercial.[113] If mentioned at all, the highly rendered and controlled 'photographic' style of her later works is discarded as prosaic.

[112] Specifically it was the identification of her paintings with female orgasm that incited O'Keefe's famous denial of sexual content in her pictures and her subsequent withdrawal from the public eye. (**Betterton** 1996 p87.)

[113] O'Keefe's landscape paintings form a significant part of her later contributions as an artist. Richard Cork wrote that these paintings were reminiscent of 'postcards' and commercial art because they had the quality of 'Technicolor.' (Cork in **Betterton** 1996 p87.)

Rosemary Betterton suggests that critical consideration of O'Keefe's work remains static because, as a woman painter her pictures raise questions about how the body of the *female* artist is figured in her work.[114] The invariable assessment of her works in sexual terms, she proposes, arises strangely enough from the precise painting style employed by the artist. Unlike the bodily traces and painterly gestures effected by her male artist peers, the technically controlled paintwork adopted by O'Keefe fails to deliver the sensuous promise suggested by her iconography. Paul Rosenfield's comment that O'Keefe's paintings allow the viewer to "see the mysterious parting movement of petals under the rays of sudden fierce heat";[115] and Frank Whitford's description of O'Keefe's flowers as images from "which tumescent pistils emerge from moist labia like petals and buds strain against tightly enclosing, sheath like leaves"[116] are indicative, Betterton suggests, of unfulfilled sexual desire.[117] The frequent dismissal of O'Keefe's abilities as a painter, on the grounds that her works lack spontaneous gesture and textural variation, indicates the frustration her critics experience at not being able to access the female body metaphorically implicit in the artist's paintings. O'Keefe's pictures allude to the female body, but it "is a body held in check and rendered impenetrable by the technical control over the process of painting."[118] Betterton's proposition, as unlikely as it may seem, finds some form of confirmation in a comment the critic William Packer made about O'Keefe's paintings:

> Rather it is the image that is all – which is another way of saying that the painter is no painter at all. For the true painter is always quite as much engrossed in the stuff of painting as he is in the making, as the

[114] **Betterton** 1996 p87.

[115] Rosenfield quoted by **Betterton** 1996 p87.

[116] Whitford quoted by **Betterton** 1996 p87.

[117] **Betterton** 1996 p88. Of Whitford's comment Betterton asks: " precisely who is straining here ...?"

[118] **Betterton** 1996 p91.

> pigment comes of (s) the brush onto the canvas, as he is in the external reference or stimulus.[119]

Packer's observation supports the assumption that the painter's work should reveal the artist's sexual (phallic) relationship to his subject through the 'stuff' of paint - the artist's paintbrush should 'come' without the artist's conscious control.[120] With their lack of gestural articulation and tightly painted surfaces O'Keefe's paintings provide the antithesis of unconscious male expression. The artist's pictures, as Betterton wrote, "could not be recognised in terms of the masculine body of painterly expression, nor did they offer up the requisite female sexuality."[121] O'Keefe's pictures, with their vulgar colour and lack of painterly expression, are considered by many, not to be paintings at all. In the assertion of what is significant and what is prosaic such critical distinctions echo classical ideals that separate great art (male) from the 'unauthentic' expression of popular culture (female).

Contemporary Feminist Approaches to Painting the Body

Viewed within the above context it is understandable that the feminist artists of the 1970s and 80s decisively rejected painting as exemplifying the most resistant and demonstrative discourse within Modernism. Painting with its assertion of art as a blank space, on which to deposit meaning through self-affirming gestures, had no place within the register of concrete struggles on and beyond the battlefield of representation.[122] More concerned to reveal cultural inscriptions of gender and dismantle representational processes, Feminism confirmed art as a form of textual politics rather than as a

[119] Packer made this comment in 1993, quoted by **Betterton** 1996 p87.

[120] **Betterton** 1996 p87.

[121] **Betterton** 1996 p88.

[122] **Betterton** 1996 pp138-176.

privatised space of self-generated significance.[123] The forsaking of painting has meant that although there were many notable women artists who continued to paint, they have done so in relative obscurity.[124] It is only within recent years that a new generation of women painters has begun to ask whether it is possible to produce different forms and languages for painting. Because this is only a recent development there is, as yet, little published on contemporary women painters, and even less on women practitioners who are specifically exploring the complex set of relations between gender, subjectivity and paint media.

Jenny Saville is amongst the few contemporary women painters, using direct representations of the naked female body, whose work has consistent and regular exposure. Her pictures of larger than life-sized women have no parallels within recent times and their enormous scale has no precedent within the history of the genre of the nude. Pictorially these massive bodies are unsurpassed. The imposing female figures painted from photographs taken of the artist own body, expand and extend beyond the confines of the canvases. The cropping of these grotesquely enlarged figures, together with their further dissection, fragmentation and distortion within the picture's space, blurs the peripheries of the bodies. In this Saville's naked subjects run counter to the closed and carefully moulded bodies usual within conventional pictures of female nudes.

These pictures of women are intensely corporeal in nature, their monstrousness is as tactile as it is visible. It is not only the physically large dimensions of these pictures that creates this presence but the method with

[123] Pollock in Barrett and Phillips 1992 p146.

[124] The sidelining of painting also reflected a general trend in art that occurred in the mid 70s. The traditional discourse of painting, centred on the figure of the male creator, re-emerged with some force in the 80s; its re-emergence coinciding with substantial inroads made by women artists into the art world. Neo-expressionist painting restored to the markets and galleries their prize commodity – the body of the artist (predominantly male) "through the new look and gesture now marketed as style." (Pollock in Barrett and Phillips 1992 p155.)

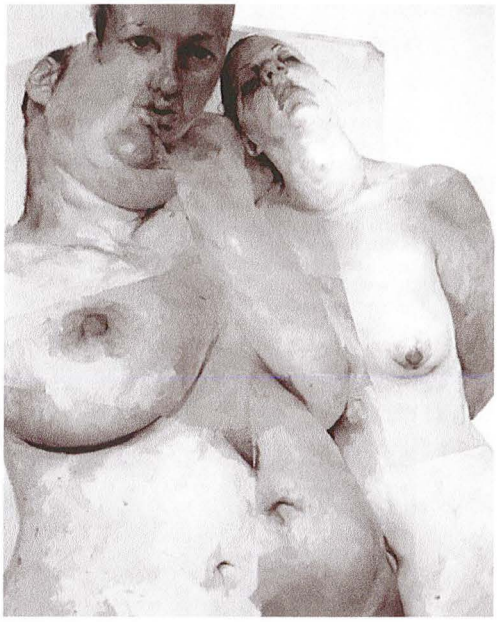

Fig 18. Jenny Saville, *Rubens' Flap*, 1999

which the artist applies her paint in gestural marks and "brutal slathering of pigment."[125] The viscosity of the paint, with lighter tones breaking open to reveal blood red layers beneath, assaults the eye with its corpulence and materiality. Linda Nochlin writes that it is this tangible quality of Saville's painting's that gives them their visual and emotional impact. The "relentless embodiment" of these pictures, Nochlin suggests, brings out "our worst anxieties about our own corporeality."[126] Both the physicality of Saville's figures, and their monumental scale, give mastery to her female subjects. Their unwillingness to retreat from the viewer's gaze questions our perceptions of the female body in challenging ways.[127]

Apart from Saville it has been difficult to find examples of contemporary painters engaging directly with iconography of the female body.[128] Of interest though is a group of current practitioners linked by their common aim to investigate painting as a practice that continues to reproduce the structures of sexual difference. I have included below brief discussion of

[125] **Nochlin**, Linda 'Floating in Gender Nirvana' p95 in *Art in America*, No. 3 March 2000, pp 94-7.

[126] **Nochlin** 2000 p97.

[127] **Meskimmon** 1996 p125.

[128] In her article 'Painting, Feminism, History' Pollock focuses on a more general discussion of the issues women face as painters rather than providing specific examples of women painters. (See **Pollock** in **Barrett** and **Phillips** 1992 pp138-176.)

three of these painters, Eve Muske, Laura Godfrey-Issacs and Rosa Lee.[129] Although these artists work predominantly in non-representational frameworks, their concerns that lie primarily with highlighting the lack of visual languages through which women can voice issues of subjectivity, make their approaches relevant to my thesis.

As a starting point for her paintings, Muske draws upon symbols and signs typically assigned as female. The context in which she places these 'signs' makes it evident that she is employing them as parody rather than re-confirming them as specific to female sensibility. For example, in her installation *orange, blue, mirror, skin, grid*, (1992), the artist 'quotes' femininity through a series of decorative canvases constructed from clothing, mirror and patterned fabric. The panels are displayed with a second series of canvases that 'quote' Geometric Abstraction, Minimalist grids and Colour Field painting, styles conventionally associated with men. Because the two distinctly different forms of representation are exhibited together we know the artist is not interested in these styles as expressive signs, but rather because they clearly signify the gendered discourse of Modernism. In this work Muske is questioning painting as a practice that both structures and reproduces the meanings of sexual difference and posits the 'feminine' as culturally inferior.[130]

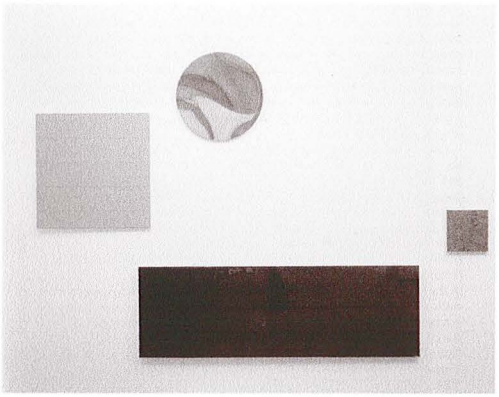

Fig 19. Eve Muske, *orange, blue, mirror, skin, grid*, 1992

The painter Godfrey-Isaacs has also frequently employed iconography and signs traditionally labelled as feminine. For example in her painting *Pink*

[129] Betterton discusses these and several other women painters in her book *An Intimate Distance, Women Artists and the Body*. (**Betterton** 1996.)

[130] **Betterton** 1996 p98.

Fig 20. Godfrey-Isaacs, Laura, *Pink Surface*, (detail), 1992

Surface, (1992), the paint is used in ways that signify softness and pliability. The artist has employed these painterly signs because as qualities they have traditionally signified the feminine body.[131] But the artist is not using these because she identifies with them as innately feminine qualities, but rather as a form of parody. This is evidenced by the excessive execution of the painting; its extreme scale, sickly acid and intensely pink colour, and sagging and viscous surface. Her approach forces the viewer to recognize the 'feminine' signs as constructions of femininity rather than as natural or inherent attributes of femaleness. Like Muske, Godfrey-Isaacs highlights painting as a process that has invested within its discourse, structures promoting sexual difference. Her work points to the difficulties faced by women attempting to find new languages through which to visually express issues of female subjectivity.

In her paintings, Lee combines geometrical structures and rigidly composed numerical systems - signifiers of purity, closure and control - within complex, ornamental patterns and fluid surfaces that dissolve into webs of flowing colour and textural patterning. The artist is interested in bringing together both 'male' and 'female' symbolic orders in order to reveal these as conventions used to connote gender difference and maintain rigid gender

[131] **Betterton** 1996 p96.


Fig 21. Rosa Lee, *Speculum No.7*, 1990

categorisations.[132] Her frequent use of decorative features and her desire "to make paintings of unnecessary detail"[133], indicates a further interest in the re-evaluation of the inferior place held by 'the decorative' in painting.[134] In works, such as *Speculum No.7*, (1990), Lee has employed pattern to attempt to convey the elusive nature of female subjectivity. She uses surface ornamentation and tactile qualities to suggest 'femininity', but the reference to Luce Irigarary[135] suggested in the title links the piece to the writer's use of the concave mirror as metaphor for the elusive and reflected nature of female subjectivity.[136]

Through their work, all three artists question conventional scripts intimating femininity. Whilst not attempting to bring new expression to 'the feminine', each is nevertheless concerned with the complex relations of gender, subjectivity and paint media. The difficulty of finding a visual language through which to express aspects of female subjectivity is generally of ongoing concern for many feminist art practitioners. The artists discussed in the final part of this chapter base their practices within this continuing challenge. However, rather than expressing themselves through two-

[132] Paintings I completed in the early nineties evolved from similar intentions. I combined linear geometric structures within decorative grounds. Sexually hybrid body parts, referring to both male and female were entwined within the structures. See works from *Tell Me a Story* exhibition catalogue.

[133] Lee quoted by **Betterton** 1996 p103.

[134] **Betterton** 1996 p103.

[135] See Irigarary's book *Speculum of the other woman.*

[136] **Betterton** 1996 p103

dimensional representations, the cited artists find commonality in their direct use of their bodies within video, film and performance media. As such, these approaches have been influential in the conceptual formation of my images rather than its methodology.

5. Feminism, Subjectivity and the Body in Representation

The primary aim of the project, to investigate ways of representing female subjectivity, led to an investigation into issues of self-representation within feminist cultural practice. The problem of self-representation has been at the forefront of feminist discourse since the sixties. This meant that there was a wealth of material to draw upon and it would have been appropriate to include any number of themes from the field of feminist body politics. Given the scope of this exegesis I have selected only a limited number of discrete topics that reflect my particular areas of focus. At the centre of inquiries have been the practices of women who employ their bodies directly as the subject for their art.

Feminist Approaches to Self-Representation

Within the Feminist movement there has never been a cohesive position concerning the female body in representation. Yet despite varying opinions there exists the common recognition of the need to challenge structures that have perpetuated uneven subject and object relations within the visual field. For contemporary feminists, this goal has remained of central concern and it is possible to recognise distinct strategies used to disrupt conventional viewing relations. Of these Hybridisation,[137] Fragmentation,[138] and

[137] One approach to contesting conventional subject/object relations is by complicating the boundaries that define gender difference. In recent practice artists have approached this objective by creating sexually indeterminate and hybrid body forms that undermine the modernist concept of gender as a stable entity. Sexual hybridisation is a feature of the amorphous forms found in the sculptures of Louise Bourgeois. For example in her piece *Janus Fleuri*, (1968), Bourgeois combines both

Transgression have been of interest in recent practice. However for this last part of the exegesis, I have focused on the work of artists using transgressive strategies. I have taken this approach not because I want to suggest that my works have the radical edge particular to many of these practices, but rather because artists commonly use their bodies as subject for their art.

Transgression and Censorship

Art practice is considered transgressive when it is seen to threaten values, mores and hierarchies at the very core of any given society. Within contemporary art practice artists have employed transgressive acts primarily

male and female body parts – a rough vulva-like middle surrounded by two smooth penile ends - to create a disturbingly deformed object. Although obviously human in origin the unfamiliarity of this object destabilises the identification processes of traditional viewing relations. It is not sufficiently 'like us' to enable identification to proceed. Hybridisation strategies are also evident in recent art practice that responds to increasing interdependence between the human body and technology. The hybrid body forms created by artists interested in this relationship are frequently labelled 'post-human'. These forms are made in reference to the not 'purely' human forms created by medical interventions into the body. An example of this approach to the 'representation' of the 'post-human' body is evidenced in the numerous body and facial reconstructions undertaken by the artist Orlan. The 'post-human' body is also found in cyber-feminist art. The cyber-body orientates the body towards new "affirmative, desiring, quasi-autonomous bodies, which transcend gender and racial differences". (**McDonald** 2001 p197) This form of art practice assumes that technology has the potential to produce bodies that avoid the imprint of patriarchal gender distinctions and thereby can transcend existent binaries. Linda Dement's interactive work *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* from the early 90s is one such example. The interactive consists of parts of women's bodies that are grafted together to form new (and grotesque) creatures. For further discussion on hybridisation in art practice see 'Hybrid ambiguities' in **McDonald** 2001 pp187-217.

[138] Fragmentation offers another approach to the disruption of conventional subject/object relations. Like the indeterminate subject the fragmented figure counters the mirage of unity important in identification processes. One such example is the photographic installation piece *Sculptural*, (1984-5), by Hannah Villiger. For this work the artist photographed parts of her body by holding a Polaroid camera in one hand. The positioning of the camera lens within the body's space means that Villiger recorded her body as a series of segmented parts. The contorted and ambiguous fragments that result rebuff identification because the viewer is unable to locate or project an ideal self-image into the picture's space. Thus whilst Villiger employs her naked body as subject matter, its fragmentation into unfamiliar segments halts the conventional voyeuristic gaze. See **Curtis**, Penelope, 'Introduction' p 7 in *Elective Affinities*, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1993 pp6-12.

to upset stereotypical representations of women and femininity. Feminist art practices considered transgressive are thought so because frequently artists employ their naked bodies in public, in ways that violates social standards. History has demonstrated such unorthodox practices habitually bear the brunt of public concern. Censorship can be a recurring problem because women seem particularly vulnerable to judgments about what is appropriate behaviour.[139] The censoring of Shigeko Kubota and Carolee Schneemann for using their bodies *as* art in the sixties finds parallels in recent times in the censoring of the art of Karen Finely, Linda Sproul and Annie Sprinkle. Examples of censorship, of course, extend to male artists, but more often the men's activities are lauded as avant-garde statements while their female counterparts continue to be condemned for their moral violation, their breaching of social mores bringing to the fore issues about pornography.[140] The image of women, circulating freely in public, recycles the definition of women *as body* but does not permit them to use their bodies in ways other than those endorsed through predominant representations.

Ironically, a further difficulty faced by women artists using their bodies as subject for their art comes from within the Feminist movement itself. Some feminists argue that women using their bodies as subject for their art come

[139] Censorship occurs through public desire to make invisible activities seen to be inappropriate and threatening to normal male/female relations and definitions of gender. Uneven social relations have meant that censorship is frequently more pronounced for women. Trans-sexual and male homosexual imagery is also frequently censored. These bodies remain disturbing to social conventions because they are considered threatening to male prowess through confusion of male/female gender roles.

[140] An example of this can be seen in the different public responses to Bruce Nauman's and Vito Acconci's engagement in explicit body art compared to that of Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke and Lynda Benglis. Whilst the men's art was perceived as a valid practice, body art activities by the women were deemed narcissistic or pornographic. A case in point was Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* performance from 1976 in which she stood naked and read from a paper scroll that she extracted slowly from her vagina. This act attracted vehement public outrage; no such clamour arose when Acconci attempted a 'sex change' by burning the hair from his chest, pulling at the skin to form breasts, tucking his penis between his legs and placing his penis in the mouth of the woman kneeling behind him.

perilously close to their bodies being assimilated as the very objectification they seek to deconstruct.[141] This problem has been particularly notable at times when there have been very public debates about the effects of pornography on sexual violence towards women. That the issues are more pronounced at these times suggests that distinctions between pornography and explicit representations made by women artists as cultural commentary have become blurred. These differences in opinion of how women should represent themselves in public have created a split within feminism itself. The *Good Girl* feminists, as the 'anti-porn' feminists are labelled, consider activities in which women employ their naked bodies as art mostly inappropriate; the *Bad Girl* feminists support their right to reshape traditional inscriptions of sexual power through overt means. They argue that only by undermining hierarchal relations that define what is seen to be socially appropriate behaviour for women can women truly find ways of speaking for themselves.

Transgressive Practices

Because of the issues outlined above, it is important that artists employing their naked bodies within their art develop ways of undermining prevailing viewing relations. In recent art one approach has been to question fixed definitions of gender, a practice that finds parallels with hybridisation strategies because artists explore subjectivity through multiple forms rather than within singular definitions of male or female. By presenting gender as fluid and as sexually indeterminate artists can subvert gender stereotypes produced and promoted by society, while simultaneously confusing viewing habits.

An example of this approach can be found in the performance piece, *Which Side do you Dress*, (1992), by Linda Sproul. In this work the artist plays two consecutive roles - Victor and Victoria. The obvious characterisation

[141] **Meskimmon** 1996 p113.

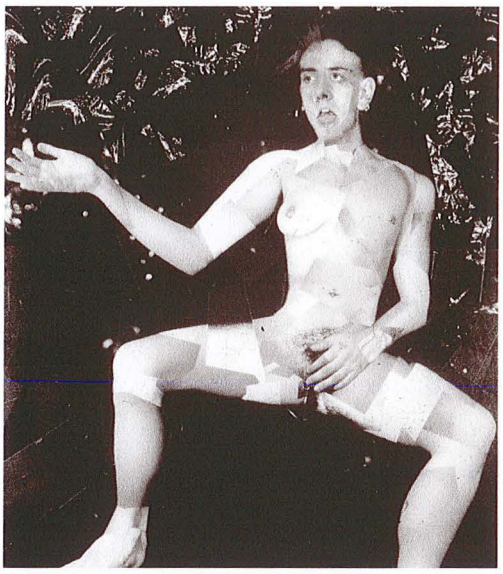

Fig 22. Michele Bradford, *Pierced Hermaphrodite*, 1993

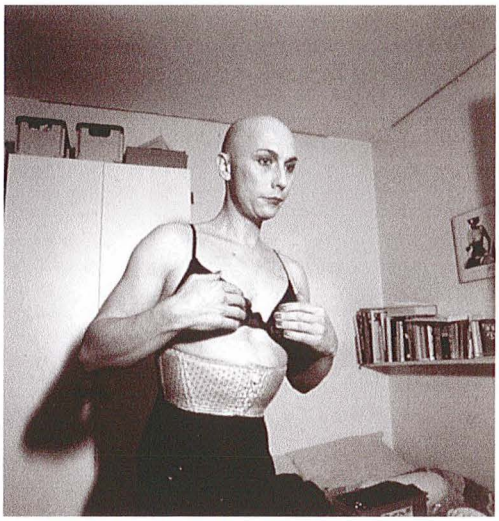

Fig 23. Grace Lau, *What She Wants*, 1992

adopted by Sproul highlights the fact that gender is fabricated through a series of external 'signs' indicated by dress, posture, gesture and behaviour. As 'Victor', Sproul performed in a transparent chiffon suit, the outfit conveying the idea that gender is constructed on the exterior of the body.[142] The character's gestures mimicked the poses and actions of cricket and football umpires. The spectators were able to "see through the acts and surfaces that constituted 'the man', to the mocking 'woman' who performed those acts and wore those surfaces like a series of costumes."[143] For the second role Sproul discarded the suit and 'Victoria', a nightclub stripper, costumed in stilettos, nipple clamps, false blond hair, chains, and a large satin bow around her waist, emerged. 'Victoria' walked amongst the audience, suggestively touching them and inviting them to perform pornographic gestures. She then retired to a stage where she carried out a seductive 'striptease.' The erotic manner with which she caressed her

[142] **McDonald** 2001 p104.

[143] **McDonald** 2001 p105.

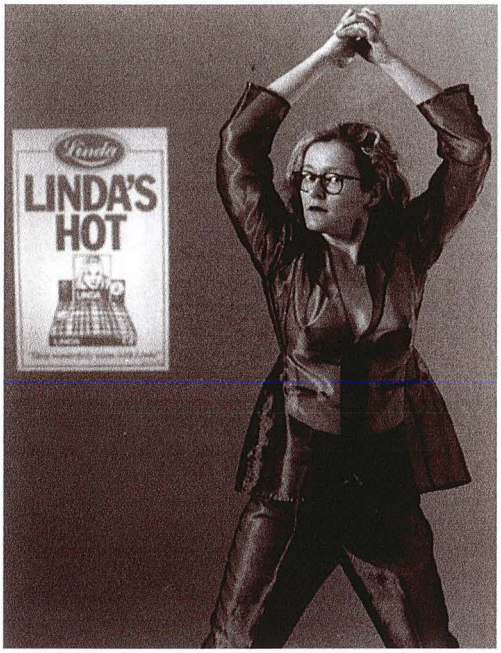

Fig 24. Linda, Sproul, *Which side do you dress?*, 1992

body, seemingly unaware of her public situation, placed her audience in a voyeuristic position. The unease and:

> embarrassment caused by this obvious fantasy underscored how the enactment of gender involves not only the internal production and dissemination of semiotic codes, but also interaction between bodies at specific times and locations.[144]

Sproul's performance concluded with the artist handing out calling cards printed with the words 'Ever-remembered' and 'Words cannot Express', these memorial references suggesting that the artist and the audience were gathered together to mourn the death of gender stereotypes.[145]

A second way of undermining conventional viewing relations is through the use of reciprocity. By engaging directly with her audience an artist can subvert the detached and singular viewpoint of conventional viewing relations. Because this strategy depends on a direct engagement with an audience, artists who have explored its potential predominantly work within performance and video art.

Feminist Performance Art: Its Beginnings

The extensive social changes that occurred in many Western societies in the 1960s and 70s assisted women to become more prominent in most areas of public life. Supported by the growing Feminist Movement, women, for the

[144] **McDonald** 2001 p107.

[145] **McDonald** 2001 p107.

first time, began to play a major part within mainstream art activities. With painting identified by feminists as exemplifying the most decisive discourse of Modernism, women turned to other areas of practice less circumscribed by their male peers. Performance, photography, film and installation were chosen as avenues through which women could distinguish their art from what had gone before. Performance art in particular allowed women to express 'feminine' body spaces that had been repressed under patriarchy.[146]

Fig 25. Carolee Schneemann, *Fuses*, 1964-5

Carolee Schneemann was one of the most active artists involved with early Feminist Performance Art. Her installation *Mink Paws' Turret*, (1963), and her film *Fuses*, (1964), are upheld as the first works in which a female artist directly employed her body as subject for art. The latter work, in which the artist films herself repeatedly making love to her boyfriend, is of particular note because Schneemann breaks with conventional 'keyhole' subject/object relations by setting up a reciprocal relationship with her audience. While making love, Schneemann acknowledges the audience's presence by winking and nodding at them. In her role as both subject and object, and in her affirmation of her pleasure, Schneemann both sees and allows that she is being seen.[147] By including the viewer within the work and by making explicit her embodied

[146] For example Judy Chicago's *Red Flag* and Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* performances which directly addressed hidden aspects of the maternal body.

[147] The artist in her role as both object and subject confuses the issues of who is looking and who is looked at. Schneider writes that Schneemann "not only shows ... (her audience) that she knows- being both subject and object at once - but that she takes pleasure ... in being out about her knowledge. She is not horrified, or apologetic, or shamed. She sees and she admits that she sees." (**Schneider** 1997 p74).

pleasure Schneemann disavows the innocent passivity traditionally ascribed the female nude in art. Her naked body cannot be 'caught at the keyhole' because she is already that object:

> implicated in her own seen (s), even as she is situated as subject. Because she is both subject and object, both seer and seen, Schneemann is explicitly embodied in distinction to the veiled, disembodied or dislocated viewer of classical perspectivalism.[148]

Schneemann further disrupts normal viewing relations through formal interventions into the editing processes of the footage. The artist experimented with montage and doubling of images, destroying the seamlessness of the film by overlaying it with scratches and glitches. In addition the chaotic non-linear editing interrupts logical sequencing of narrative essential to the organisation of perspectivalism.

Unfortunately, the 'female agency' that Schneemann sought through her work was troubled by the reception of her film. Because she made her body the literal site of so much of her art, and because she underscored her sexuality as a creative force in her work, Schneemann was often dismissed as self-indulgent by the art establishment.[149] The criticism of her film as narcissistic, by the mostly male establishment, however, somewhat transparently disguises what was of real issue. In filming the penis (of her boyfriend) the artist transgressed the taboo that disallows the exposure of the phallus within the scopic field. As pointed out in the footnotes of the introductory chapter the penis remains inaccessible to representation because patriarchy is the basis of knowledge and power, and the depiction of the phallus is seen to strip men of their empowering veil.[150] Schneemann's film was also dismissed by many of her peers within the Women's Movement because it was feared that Schneemann's exaltation of sensuality too closely

[148] **Schneider** 1997 p74.

[149] **Schneider** 1997 p76.

[150] **Brooks** 1993 p18

resembled the limitation of woman to her genitalia.[151]

Despite the negative reception of her work, Schneemann nevertheless opened the way for other women artists to follow bravely in her steps. Like Schneemann's art, performances that questioned the venerated boundaries separating female sexuality and artistic authority were invariably denounced by the art establishment. The hypocrisy of these condemnations is highlighted in the example of Shigeko Kubota. When in 1965 the artist performed her *Vagina Painting* at Fluxfest in New York, a performance in which she squatted on the floor and painted on paper with a brush that extended from her vagina, the work provoked angry responses from her audiences. In direct comparison was the reception of Yves Klein's performance in which he used nude women as 'living brushes.' This work was widely celebrated and hailed as highly progressive.

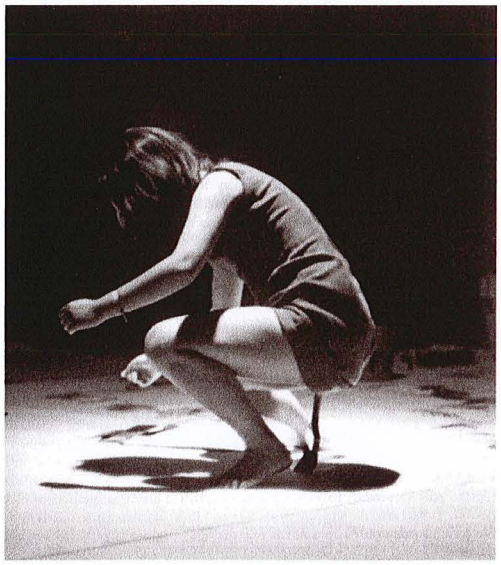

Fig 26. Shigeko Kubota, Vagina Painting, 1965

Perhaps the most notorious Feminist Body art issuing from this decade was the suite of advertisements Lynda Benglis placed in *Artforum* throughout 1974. Of the series, the most memorable was the image reproduced in the November issue. In this photograph, Benglis stood defiantly naked wearing sunglasses and clutching an extraordinarily large dildo that extended from her crotch. The gesture was an intentionally outrageous provocation of the male art establishment. Benglis sought to make prominent the insincere and hypocritical attitude of the art world towards women artists. But, artistically, the photograph was more significant. Benglis' undeviating gaze

[151] **Schneider** 1997 p76.

Fig 27. Linda Benglis, *Advertisement*, 1974

demanded direct contact with her audience making impossible the passivity particular to prevailing viewing relations. In its defiance of both convention and the art establishment, the ad offended almost everybody.[152] Benglis was accused of everything from narcissism to pornography and penis envy. Five of the magazine's editors published a letter damming the ad as an extremely vulgar act, adding that it made a mockery of feminism. The reception of Benglis photograph again made evident the different treatment of male and female artists. Benglis' photograph according to one critic was not to be confused with Vito Acconci's sexual performances in which he 'became a woman.' The critic wrote:

> superficially, Benglis' work reveals the tasteful, the glossy, and the narcissistic, while Acconci's secret sexual systems are more populist, and tend toward the squalid, the exorcistic (s) and the puritanical.[153]

Although bold and subversive these statements by women remain marginal in the pages of art history. While new freedoms meant that women for the first time were liberated to proclaim their sexuality and difference through their art, many of the first-generation feminist artists have never been awarded critical legitimisation for their innovative approaches to art, or credited for

[152] **Tanner**, Marcia, 'Mother Laughed: The Bad Girls' Avant-Garde', p74, in **Tucker** Marcia (ed and curator) *Bad Girls*, New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art New York Publication, 1994 pp47-79.

[153] **Pincus-Witten** 'Lynda Benglis', **Armstrong** and **Marshall**, *The New Sculpture* p312.

their collective and individual contributions. A shifting of emphasis in feminist theory towards an interrogation of gender as a social and cultural construction meant that the significance of early feminist activity was lost in the general cynical condemnation of their belief in gender as biologically innate. A direct consequence of this change in focus was that it became increasingly difficult for women to use their bodies as a subject for their art. With the growing interest in deconstruction theories, women using their naked bodies, were seen to reinforce problematic viewing relations. Griselda Pollock, and other art commentators, encouraged this view, through suggestions that the work of many women using their bodies was open to possible misjudgment and at too great a risk for re-appropriation within the male gaze. Pollock's recommendation was that the project of producing positive images of women be abandoned:

> ... within the present organisation, there is no possibility of simply conjuring up and asserting a positive and alternative set of meanings for women. The work to be done is that of deconstruction.[154]

Her view was generally one supported by the second-generation feminists who openly discouraged woman artists from seeking alternative representations of their bodies. Depictions of female nudity effectively disappeared from women's art practice over the ensuing decade. In is only within recent times that this position has mellowed. The nineties have seen a return to women re-investigating possible alternatives through which to represent female subjectivity. Within these new approaches there is an obvious inheritance from their artistic predecessors. The raw energy and daring of both generations of performance artists work similarly to undermine traditional viewing relations and define new possibilities for marginalised voices. The gender bending and blending, ambiguity and androgyny of the recent years has however added another level to the ongoing task of artists interested in exploring issues of self-representation.

[154] Pollock quoted by **McDonald** 2001 pp82-3.

Bad Girls

Recent feminist performance art differs from that of their seventies forebears in one very significant way. The previous generation sought to express their gender difference; contemporary artists, on the other hand, seek ways of undermining gender categories that define difference. Contemporary practice recognises gender as fluid and definitions of subjectivity as plural. The acquiescence of sexual diversity has freed contemporary artists to explore issues of gender and self-representation beyond the limitations of fixed boundaries. In the nineties there have been a series of major exhibitions entitled *Bad Girls*.[155] Although the artists participating in these shows employ a diverse range of approaches and media, they are united by the desire to redefine stereotypical and accepted definitions of gender. Many focus specifically on the transgressive and obscene sexual body, frequently employing humour as a strategy through which to reclaim their sexual and erotic power. Artists work from a common understanding that women are entitled to make representations of their own sexuality. The following comment by 'bad girl' Zoe Leonard in many ways sums up this position:

> I'm sick and tired of this constant analysis ... that we're always objectified, which we are, but we also have our own sexuality.[156]

In the catalogue accompanying the New York exhibition *Bad Girls*, Marcia

[155] The initial *Bad Girls* exhibition opened in New York in January 1994. The sister show in Los Angeles, *Bad Girls West* followed soon after, as did the *Bad Girls* exhibition in London.

[156] Leonard quoted by **McDonald** 2001 p94. Leonard's retort was a response to questions asked about her installation work in the 1992 Documenta in which only a small number of women artists had been asked to participate. Her piece was installed in a seventeenth century portrait galley in Neue Galerie, Kassel. She removed the portraits of men leaving behind those of women. In between these portraits she hung her own close-up, black and white photographs of women masturbating. The juxtaposition of her images with, as example a painting of a seventeenth-century lady fondling her "hair and veil in such a way as to reveal her naked breast and shoulder" revealed the techniques and devices of erotic titillation in the history of European painting. For further comments about this work see **McDonald** 2201 p94.

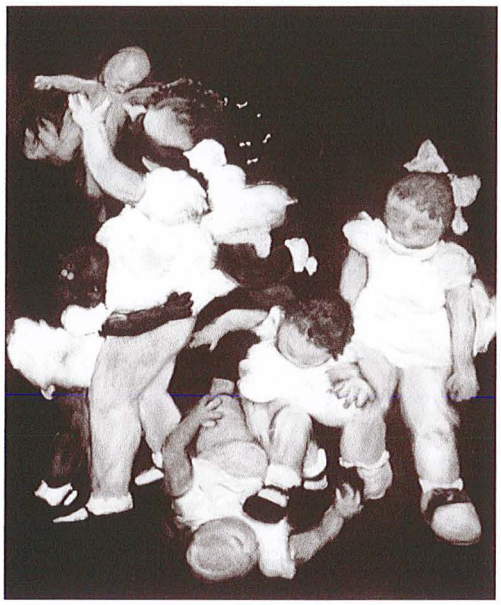

Fig 28. Kim Dingle, *Wild Girls*, 1993

Tanner provides her definition of the bad girl as "the slut you are so bent upon becoming."[157] Tanner's model, a definition with which she suggests many women may identify, is the mirror image of the 'good girl' that mothers instruct their daughters to become. Good girls are encouraged to not: "rock the boat... break the rules, question the status quo... behave excessively... do anything embarrassing... or bawdy, raucous or foul-mouthed... or... laugh much in public particularly not loudly or at anything dirty" and certainly never to "talk openly about (their) sexual proclivities and erotic fantasies."[158] Alternatively 'bad girls' who "put their needs and wants first (may) be aggressive and impolite... speak before (and while) they're spoken to... talk about their sexual explorations... and use language that's vulgar or downright obscene and (they) don't stop when their mothers threaten to wash their mouths out with soap."[159] Tanner concludes that the good girl image

[157] **Tanner** in **Tucker** 1994 p49.

[158] **Tanner** in **Tucker** 1994 p51.

[159] **Tucker** 1994 p20. Tanner suggests the history of the artist as bad girl, is a long and venerable one. The mother of all 'bad girls' she proposes is the Italian baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi, born in 1593, whose work has been ignored by art historians until relatively recently. Her paintings re-envisage images of traditional themes from what today would be considered a feminist viewpoint. Her female characters, invariably famous heroic women like Susanna, Mary Magdalene, Lucretia, Cleopatra, Esther and Judith were depicted engaged in dramatic confrontations with men. In these paintings Gentileschi gave prominence to her female characters, portraying them as powerful, aggressive, vigorous, endowed with courage and resolve and capable of carrying out premeditated acts of violence to defend themselves. Her accomplishment was so radical for its time that it apparently wasn't even recognised - the expressive content of her imagery was somehow masked by her technical virtuosity and command of contemporary

was formulated to "ensure our safe navigation through the perilous waters of the patriarchal sea we swam in."[160] And although taught to daughters by their mothers they are but "channelling the voices of our fathers, their fathers and their father's fathers, instructing us to be good girls in a man's world."[161]

Fig 29. Joan Braderman, *No More Nice Girls*, 1989

The video *No More Nice Girls*, (1989), by Joan Braderman exemplifies the 'bad girl' position. The footage is structured around a series of conversations between four stereotypical 'bad girls'. The women's status is symbolised through their black stiletto heels and heavy make-up and by their overt behaviour and foul language. While drinking heavily and smoking marijuana the women brag about their individual sexual encounters. Through their roles as "aging feminists from hell",[162] the women violate social mores that dictate that they should be neither disgusting nor loud. In their disregard for these taboos the women indicate both their disrespect for social order and their rejection of hierarchical patterns of domination and submission that are enshrined within it.[163] Braderman further exaggerates the symbolism of the women's behaviour by formally embellishing the video footage with sickening electric blue tones, candy-coloured pinks and garish greens.

styles. (**Tanner in Tucker** 1994 p53-4)

[160] **Tanner in Tucker** 1994 p49.

[161] **Tanner in Tucker** 1994 p49.

[162] **Tanner in Tucker** 1994 p53.

[163] **Tickner**, Lisa 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970' p247 in **Betterton**, Rosemary (ed) *Looking on: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts*

In this exploration of gender stereotypes the artist parodied conventional 'bad girls' to highlight implicit class bias and accompanying definitions of fitting behaviour.[164] Other artists indicate their resistance to fixed gender demarcations through explorations into multiple identities and shifting subject positions. This approach is evident in Annie Sprinkle's performance *Post Porn Modernism*, (1989).[165] As part of the performance, Sprinkle lies down on a bed, unadorned except for a speculum inserted in her vagina.[166] From this position she invites her spectators to view her cervix. While they wait in line, Sprinkle tells stories of her life, engaging her audience through exchanges and jokes. Her personal stories reflect varied viewpoints of different personalities. The artist moves from one identity to the next with such fluidity that her audience are unable to associate her with any one single persona. Through her adoption of multiple personalities, Sprinkle broadens definitions of gender and resists being classified within a general category representing 'all women'.[167]

There is a second significant aspect to this controversial work. As Rebecca Schneider[168] has convincingly argued, Sprinkle's piece rather than being pornographic, as it is frequently denounced, is extremely acute in its take on the gendered nature of the visual field. Schneider constructs her argument through a comparison of Sprinkle's performance with the high modernist artwork *Etant donnés: la chute d'eau; le gaz d'eclairage* by Marcel

and Media Pandora Press 1987 pp235-253.

[164] **Tamblyn**, Christine, 'No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Feminist Art', in *Art Journal*, Summer 1991 Vol. 50 No. 2, p55.

[165] *Post Porn Modernism* has been the focus of heated debates because its explicitness is considered by some to be pornographic. The work has been censored heavily within the United States.

[166] This section of her performance is entitled 'Public Cervix Announcement'.

[167] **Schneider** 1997 p60.

[168] **Schneider** 1997 pp58-65.

Fig 30. Annie Sprinkle, *Post Porn Modernism*, 1989

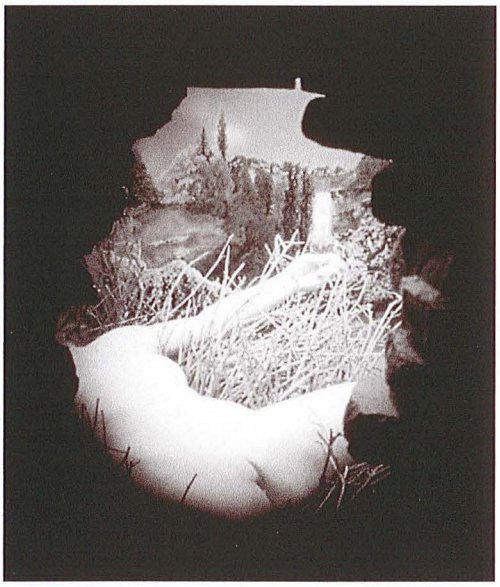

Fig 31. Marcel Duchamp, *Etant donnes*, 1946-66

Duchamp.[169] Schneider considers Duchamp's work to be an overt example "of Western habits of specularity (s): perspectival vision, with woman as vanishing point"; its underlying premise laying "bare that system's hidden assumptions".[170] She proposes that the visual correspondence occurring between Duchamp's naked female figure and that of the figure of Sprinkle reclining on stage is an intentional aping of Duchamp's gesture by Sprinkle.[171] In Duchamp's piece, the naked woman's torso lies on the other side of a hole in the door through which the viewer peers. Her head and arms are missing and the positioning of the body draws the focus directly to the woman's parted legs and genitals. In 'Public Cervix Announcement', Sprinkle's posture is matching but, rather than a hole through which to view the figure, the audience is faced with a speculum that acts as an eyepiece. However,

[169] This 'installation' took Duchamp some twenty years to complete. Its construction took place between 1946 and 1966. Schneider also suggests that Sprinkle's performance can be read as a 'take' on other Western art masterpieces such as Courbet's *Origin of the World* - a representation considered in its time to be so 'real' that its owner, Jacques Lacan, kept it veiled behind a screen. (**Schneider** 1997 p 60.)

[170] **Krauss**, Rosalind, quoted by **Schneider** 1997 p 61.

[171] **Schneider** 1997 p61.

unlike the faceless and armless torso of *Etant donnes*, Sprinkle has eyes, mouth and hands, and she is actively involved in seeing, speaking and gesturing. Through her live performance Sprinkle replaces the 'general' woman of Duchamp's work with the particularity of her actual body.

Sprinkle's actions, Schneider argues, bring the entire visual field into revolt.[172] The exchange that occurs through the artist's acknowledgment of her audience's presence whilst they peer into her cervix means that rather than external to the visual field, the gaze remains contained within it.[173] As Schneider writes: "Sprinkle's body, unlike Duchamp's *Etant donnés* ... bears a head and a gaze which complicates the seeming identity between viewpoint and vanishing point."[174] The reciprocal interaction, which the artist sets up, between the audience and herself, subverts the voyeuristic keyhole viewing exemplified by Duchamp's work. Sprinkle's performance is of interest to this exegesis, not only because it breaks down fixed definitions of gender but also because it challenges conventional subject/object relations.

The Grotesquery of the Carnival

To conclude this section on feminist approaches to the body in representation, I submit as context a photography/video installation by Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh. The work is significant because it represents women in ways that break with social expectations of them, but it is also important because the female bodies, photographed by Cummins and Walsh, recall the grotesque forms of carnival. In recent years the socially transgressive practices of carnival, and the grotesque and disproportionate body that is part of its landscape, have been recognised by contemporary practitioners as valuable motifs through which to explore alternative forms of representation. In its social manifestation, carnival provides a temporary

[172] **Schneider** 1997 p65.

[173] **Schneider** 1997 p65.

[174] **Schneider** 1997 p65.

liberation from the prevailing prohibitions of the established order; it is a space where suppressed desires can be expressed without reprisal.[175] Artists have exploited the chaotic and incongruous visual symbolism of the carnival, and its practices of role reversal, to investigate issues of identity and social relations. The rebellious space of the carnival is seen to disrupt the ordered conventions of prevailing social relations and established hierarchies.[176]

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have described carnival as "the repeated, periodic celebration of the grotesque body – fattening food, intoxicating drink, sexual promiscuity."[177] This grotesque and unchecked form is considered as inverse to the balanced and symmetrical ideal body enshrined in the figure of the nude. The classical form gives prominence to the upper portions of the body (the head and intellect); the monstrous body of carnival emphasises the lower body through distortions of the stomach, buttocks, feet, orifices and genitals.[178] The accent on base corporeality and the openings and protuberances of the body is in marked contrast to the importance placed on the opaque and closed ideal body. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the classical body as a sleek and impenetrable façade, a body from which desires and appetites are absent. He writes:

> An entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body ... That which protrudes, bulges (s), sprouts, or branches off is eliminated, hidden or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. The basis of the image is the individual, ... the impenetrable façade. The opaque surface of the body's 'valleys' acquires essential meaning as the border of a

[175] **Tucker** 1994 p23.

[176] For a more detailed analysis see **Russo**, Mary, 'Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory', in (ed) **Lauretis**, Teresa de, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986

[177] **Stallybrass**, Peter and Allon **White**, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986 p198. The authors draw extensively upon the theories of the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who first discussed the carnival as a social space that allowed for the temporary liberation from established social order.

[178] Bakhtin paraphrased by **Stallybrass** and **White** 1986 p21.

> closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world. All attributes of the unfinished world are carefully removed, as well as all signs of its inner life.[179]

This ideal body has become a symbol of western bourgeois culture and its form represents the organising principles of perspectivalism. Artist have attempted to destabilise its standing, and the norms its symbolises, by adopting the image of the grotesque, hybrid, decentred, and often humorous bodies of carnival. The multiple, blurred and excessive body of the carnival sits clearly outside the definition of the 'individual' as separate and whole and as such is important in contemporary rethinking of the feminine.

Fig 32. Cummins, Pauline and Louise Walsh, *Whale Woman*, 1992

Cummins and Walsh have taken up the symbolism of carnival as visual language through which to explore issues of female subjectivity. In their collaborative installation *Sounding the Depths*, (1992), the artists feature the grotesque body in larger than life sized photographs of the female figure. The women's bodies are ruptured by projections of enormous screaming mouths that run vertically down their torsos. The mouths metaphorically break open the women's bodies, like large wounds. The soundtrack of screaming and laughing that accompanies the visual material provides the women with a voice that simultaneously registers them as both subject and object. Their pictures can be read as a direct assault against the unity registered by the ideal classic body. The monstrosity of the depicted women's bodies and their intense physical presence acts in opposition to the sanitised, distant image of femininity as

[179] Bakhtin quoted by **Batchelor**, David, *Chromophobia*, London: Reaktion Books, p16.

found in conventional depictions of naked women. The disturbing imagery, in combination with the raw aural effect, disrupts any expectation the audience may have of visually appropriating these female bodies for their own pleasure.

The task of reinstating corporeality is a fraught and contradictory enterprise for women artists.[180] It has been argued by many that, given the persistence of perspectivalism, it is impossible for women to represent themselves free of its visual bias. This debate has been augmented in recent years by the criticism of the transgressive, grotesque and corporeal imagery of contemporary feminist practice as once more limiting the definition of women to their bodies.[181] Yet to submit to these arguments would be to give in to the belief that definitions of the body are fixed, rather than constantly made anew. The existing representational codes are surely not the only visual language through which women can speak of their embodied experiences and investigate their subjectivity. As an area of investigation, the representation of subjectivity remains an important one.

[180] **Wolff,** Janet cited in **Betterton** 1996 p137.

[181] By 'once more' I refer to the second-generation feminists' condemnation of the essentialism of earlier feminism.

Section Three: In the Studio

Introduction

The intention of this section is to provide the reader with an outline of the major formal and conceptual decisions that occurred throughout the project. The chapter has been divided into three parts with each corresponding loosely to a major developmental shift. Each part is described through a discussion of objectives, formal and technical approaches and examples of work and each concludes with an evaluation of progress.

The project's main objective has been to make representations of female subjectivity divergent from its symbolic representation prevalent within conventional pictures of the female nude. The pictures have attempted instead, to indicate the experiences of the corporeal body. Pictorially these impressions are representational, but the tactile dimensions of imagery, suggested through surface quality and pictorial space, evoke a palpable sensuality that disrupts stereotypical patterns of looking. The dimensions of the pictures are revealed through sensing of the body from a close-up viewpoint.

I have provided written descriptions of my pictures, but it is important to stress that fundamental aspects of my works can only be appreciated through the physical experience of standing in front of them. This is particularly so given that an encompassing aim of this project has been to engage the viewer in experiences transcending the merely descriptive.

General Comments on Methodologies Particular to all Stages of the Project

The following methodologies were established from the outset of the project and with variation have remained relevant for its entirety.

Digital imaging has played a significant role in image development with the application Photoshop providing new and varied possibilities for creation. The flexibility of the program has facilitated experimentation and has allowed me to refine images extensively in the computer before committing them to prints or paintings. As the project developed, time spent working and reworking material within the computer increased and I found its expediency contrasted dramatically with the lengthy processes of painting. As a tool for constructing imagery the computer was a logical development from my former use of photocopiers to assist with picture making. The images created with the aid of the copier were used as 'sketches' for my paintings, the differences between source materials given cohesion through the painting process.[182] In a similar way the computer weaves together diverse materials into new configurations, its distorting and layering tools adding further dimensions to the collaging capabilities of photocopiers. Photoshop encourages a seamless amalgam of material, the resulting cohesiveness well surpassing the capabilities of the copier. This seamlessness is at the centre of my practice.

As mentioned, the tactile quality of imagery, within both paintings and prints, has been of primary concern throughout. Early on I had thought that my subject required the plasticity and texture of paint media to create the material dimensions sought, and I used digital prints primarily as

[182] I am intrigued by the methodologies Ingres used to construct his images. He brought together a vast range of diverse source material using collage and tracing techniques, reversing, enlarging and retracing figures and objects repeatedly until they were re-organised into a cohesive picture. Only then was the 'drawing' ready to transfer to canvas.

preparatory sketches. The full realisation of my pictures through paint was also necessitated by the high failure rate that occurred within initial trialing of digital prints. High gloss paper and synthetic colouring of inks were inherent to early digital print technologies. The unattractive 'look' these bought to imagery, in combination with my inexperience with the technology, contributed to disappointing results. However, in the course of my research project, two main factors contributed to a shift towards prints as principal output. The most immediate were advances in printer technologies,[183] but more significant were achievements within image layering processes and printing techniques. Working methods developed within these areas assisted me in achieving rich and visually dense surfaces.

Within digital imaging, experimentation was centred upon layering techniques and the use of filters. One of the key features of Photoshop is the way in which images can be worked up in multiple layers, layers that can be kept separate so as to be individually altered at any stage. The manner in which I approached layering techniques reflected my roots in painting. The photographic source imagery acted as an outline or template, its original form progressively eroded through repeated processes of laying down pattern and texture, 'glazing' with colour and 'rubbing back.' However, unlike the layering of paint, Photoshop enables layers to remain hovering, to be adjusted for colour, tone and opacity and to be re-ordered and re-combined in different configurations until a satisfactory outcome is achieved. Frequently I juggled twenty to thirty layers, working back and forth between them, merging some only when the image became so cumbersome as to slow working processes severely.[184] Although often tedious, and generally considered to be unnecessary because in printing the computer compresses

[183] All exhibited prints, and backup prints produced in the last phase of the project were printed on a Roland Hi-Fi Inkjet Printer (6 colours). Prints used in the earlier stages as 'drawings' to be further rendered in paint were printed on an Encad Novajet Pro 50 (4 colours).

[184] Digital images frequently reach 600 megabytes or more in this process.

multiple layers into a single surface, I have nevertheless found a correlation between the number of layers and pictorial density. The interlacing of form and texture with washes and glazes of semi-transparent colour, when merged into a single surface for printing, creates visually complex results that are richer than prints created from a single image layer. A second area of experimentation within imaging lay within the use of filters.[185] I am particularly wary of the easily recognisable mark of 'digital' filters, the effects of these all too often end up as just that. In order to overcome the obvious pictorial traces left by them I applied one filter or distortion layer over the next, the mark of each countering or adding to the previous one until its trace became confused. This allowed me to enjoy the full range of possibilities offered by digital filters without their effects being visually overt.

Surface character was also affected by interventions at the print stage. I found I could create more varied surface quality through the further use of 'noise' filters applied to the image immediately prior to its printing. Through trial I found that many filters, if applied to the image at small scale, resulted in ugly surface 'patterns' when the image was enlarged to print. Applying filters after the image was scaled up produced much more subtle results. Further improvements to print quality were achieved by using colour, tone and contrast adjustment layers. These allowed for subtle variations in hue, tone and intensity. With these adjustment layers a print could be readily modified and re-tested for print quality. An image, that may have taken several months being figured digitally, could take several weeks of experimenting with both filters and adjustment layers, before it was ready to be printed at full scale. Throughout the project I was fortunate to have unlimited access to a high-end large format printer and computers

[185] Filters are pre-packaged 'effects' that can be applied to imagery to alter its look. For example, images can be blurred, sharpened, pixelated, distorted, textured, stylised etc. The overall effect of these filters on imagery varies in intensity, the user can select options to control how discernible its 'mark' is.

capable of handling the unwieldy files necessary for printing at this scale.[186] This has had enormous advantages for the testing of colour and surface variation.

Images that found their final resolution in painting were those that, regardless of effort, never attained their full potential as prints. They were also those pictures that required, I felt, the texture and colour luminosity of paint media to fully capture their pictorial potential. Once selected as images to be painted, digital 'sketches' were printed out at A4 size and transferred to the larger sheets of glass with the aid of an opaque projector. The use of glass as a support came about through a process of trialing a range of different materials. The canvas I used previously was inappropriate - its reading as 'painting' disrupting the representational ambiguity important to the work. I sought a surface that imparted an even though not overly smooth quality to the painted image, properties that would allow for the production of coexistent reading of photographic illusionism and pictorial artifice. I experimented with canvas on board, wood, metal (unprepared and sandblasted) and glass (also unprepared and sandblasted). The brittle tactility of the sandblasted glass not only provided a seductive material ambiguity but it also enabled me to develop surfaces that created the readings I desired. In early works glass sheets were suspended several centimetres off the wall with the aid of an s-shaped bracket developed specifically for this purpose. I liked the thin edge of the glass because it again provided pictorial ambiguity. Without backing support, however I experienced a series of breakages while paintings were in transit. I tested hardened glass and reinforced glass but neither guaranteed against their vulnerability; and their weight meant they were difficult to transport. I

[186] I have access to DARF, the Digital Art Research Facility, at the School of Art, Hobart. Access to this facility has allowed me to have full control of the output of prints and assisted me in achieving the results I sought. For further information on DARF refer to Appendix A.

resolved the problem by mounting the images on 15mm composite board bevelled back at the edges. Although this doubled the thickness of the edge it stabilised the glass whilst still satisfying the desire for fluid readings between forms of pictorialism.

Phase One: 1998

Phase one incorporated works undertaken in the early stages of the project. Works completed in this phase were exhibited in *Containment*, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, 1997, and *Offline*, Jam Factory as part of the Adelaide Festival, 1998. All resolved works from this phase were executed as oil paintings on glass.

Objectives

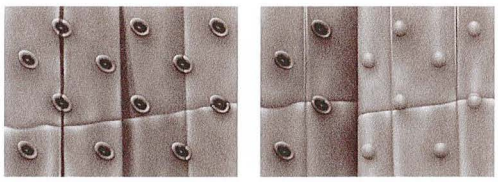

Fig 33. *Kiss*, 1997

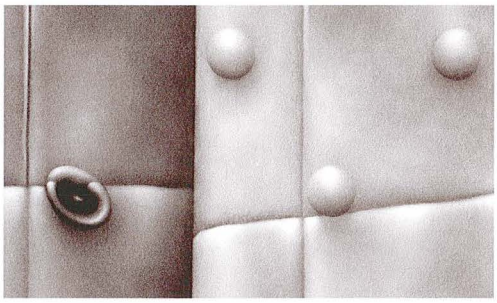

Fig 34. *Kiss* (detail), 1997

The preliminary objective was to trial ways of making pictures that, through formal arrangements, would assert more complex methods of viewing at variance with the distant and ocular-centric viewpoint of perspectivalism. On the matter of subject, the pictures were intended to test possibilities in my quest for a new female subjectivity.

Formally, my objective was to assert surface qualities, detail (pattern) and ambience as primary concerns. In terms of content, my decision was to work with sexually evocative forms, abstracted from parts of the female body. The ambiguous nature of these fragments, as compared to depictions of the whole body, offered possibilities for creating pictorial arrangements that provided alternate viewing experiences.

Formal and Technical Approaches

Initial experimentation revolved around ways of integrating abstracted segments of the body within uniform grounds. I wanted to make pictures comprising continuous and detailed surfaces with little differentiation between figure and ground. I also wanted pictures with no focal point from which to read specific narrative sequencing. The intention was that, with no focal point, or hierarchical arrangements from which to begin to make sense of the picture, the viewer would be compelled to move towards the image to scan the detailed surface from a close-up viewpoint. Comprehension would come through 'feeling' the painting from this close-up position rather than from 'reading' in a cerebral objective manner from some distant point.

To create a sense of continuous rather than closed readings I arranged the pictorial elements over several panels. To further increase this effect I experimented with three additional formal devices - repetition, even modelling and unvarying tonal colour; these brought uniformity to all pictorial elements - no part of the picture was more, or less, important than any other part.

The works created within this first phase were the first works manipulated within the computer. They were composed from photographic material as well as direct scans of the body, objects and folded and hand-stitched material. The techniques employed in their construction involved very basic layering and manipulation processes.

Specific Works

Containment Series

This series of paintings was inspired by a quote attributed to Augustine Esponosa that read: "I had fallen asleep amongst twenty breasts, twenty mouths, twenty genitalia, twenty thighs, twenty tongues and twenty eyes of

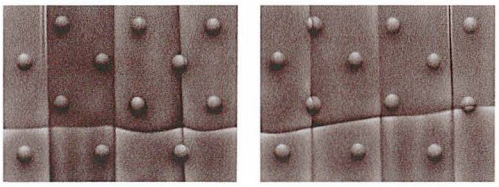

Fig 35. *Untitled*, 1997

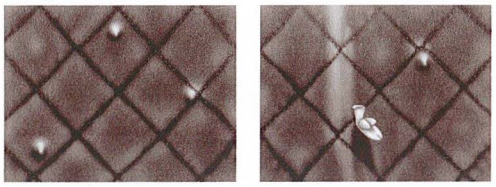

Fig 36. Bud, 1997

one woman." [187] Although various configurations were generated digitally only three were resolved as paintings, *Bud*, *Kiss* and *Untitled*; each work comprising two panels. The figurative elements of these pictures, comprising nipples, navels and body orifices, were organised into repeated patterns. These 'patterns' were then integrated within monochromatic fields, geometrically divided by razor-sharp folds and precise stitching. The detailed and visually resistant, skin-like surfaces of these paintings, achieved through successive layers of fine scumbling and thin transparent glazes, imparted a strong tactile quality. I felt that the intense palpability conveyed by the detailed surfaces would entice the viewer to come close to examine the picture's surface in intimate detail.

Objects

A series of 'Object' pictures was painted on the completion of the 'Containment' works. These pictures although not successful in their final outcome were significant because in painting them I began to experiment with semi-transparent milky glazes. I was attempting to create a similarly dense and resilient but less 'flat' surface to that found in the earlier series. I was pleased with the results. Intriguingly the milky fields read both as impervious surface, and as dense space. Their ambiguity provided an expansive field in which to embed objects in arrangements other than perpendicular to the picture plane. This opened up new possibilities for

[187] Espnosa quoted by **Richardson**, Michael, (ed), *The Dedalus Book of Surrealism: The Identity of Things*, Cambridge: Dedalus, Sawtry, pp79-81.

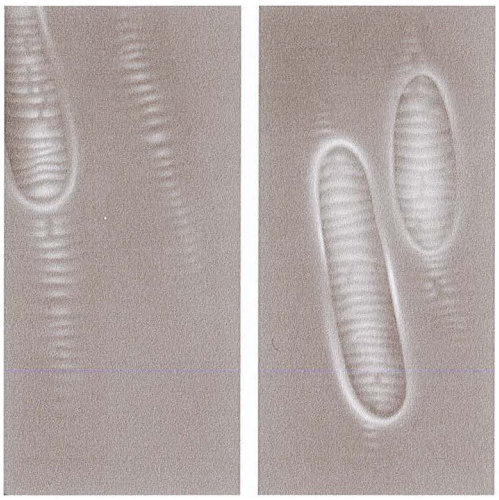

Fig 37. *Objects*, 1998

composition because forms could be placed as if they were receding back into the pictorial space. On the completion of these pictures I temporarily abandoned this approach, because, although I was happy with formal experimentation, I was unsure of the imagery I was employing. The experimentation laid the groundwork for figure-ground and spatial effects achieved within the 'Good Girl' pictures and was formative to the construction of later digital prints.

Vanitas

The source images[188] used within the 'Object' pictures evolved through a succession of digital works into a five-panelled piece entitled *Vanitas*. The aim of this work was to see if it was possible to achieve a non-hierarchical pictorial arrangement, composed of *differing* figurative elements, as compared to the repeated patterning of the earlier works. The idea was to give equal pictorial weighting to each panel in order to break, not only with graded arrangements, but also the left to right sequencing of conventional illusionism. The objects depicted within the panels were cropped to give the effect of expanding into the space between the separate panels.[189] The

[188] The objects were selected from Francisco Barrera's painting *Summer_1638*, oil on canvas, 1660mm x 250mmm, Seville Museo de Bellas Artes. The painting was reproduced in **Jordan**, William, B. and Peter **Cherry**, *Spanish Still Life from Velázquez to Goya*, Great Britain: National Gallery Publications, 1995 p65. The glass vessel was formed through a composite of a glass jar and computer-derived 'hand-drawn' elements, whilst the hair/water panels were derived from scanned images of drawn hair.

[189] There were several digital variations of *Vanitas*. The final work was at variance with earlier versions in which the elliptical form was enclosed within the boundaries of the support.

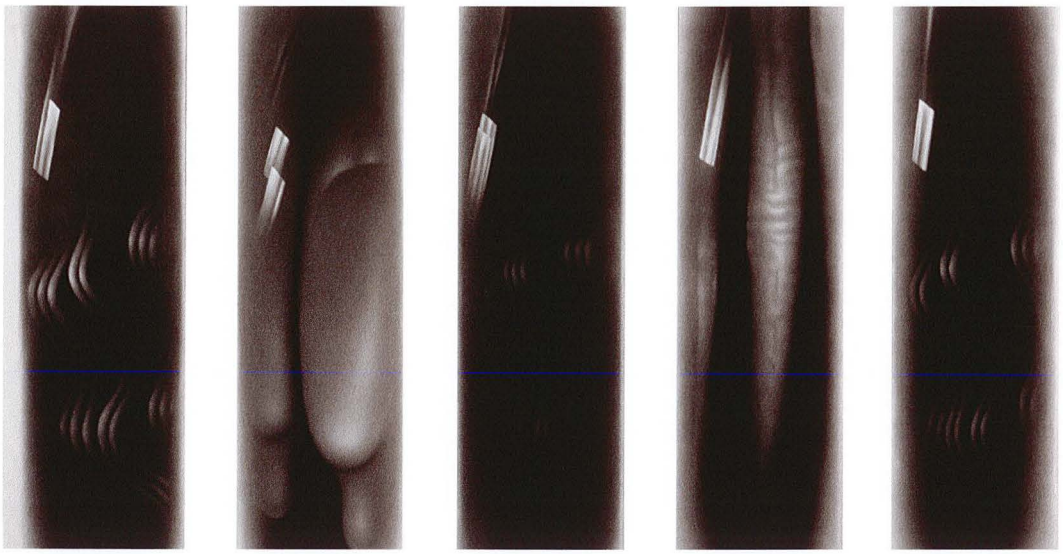

Fig 38. *Vanitas*, 1998

cropping also assisted the eye to move fluidly from one image to the next without a break in the visual field, its continuity further denying closed readings. The three interspersed hair/water images were employed to enhance this effect by enticing the eye into a continuous circular movement through visual repetition.[190]

[190] I was unaware of the Photo-realist painter Audrey Flack's series of *Vanitas* paintings at the time I produced this work. Her pictures, through their pictorial organisation, form a direct link with seventeenth century Dutch *Vanitas* paintings. I found these paintings interesting because the depicted objects are arranged as if indifferent to the viewer's position and as with Dutch *Vanitas* pictures, the imagery extends beyond the frame of the Albertian window. Her concern with descriptions of fragmentary, detailed and richly articulated surfaces accords well with the indifference to the hierarchy characteristics of perspectivalism. Flack's art is of further note because of the difficulties the artist experienced working within a male dominated art world. Louis Meisel wrote: "Long before women's liberation ... became a major issue of the late sixties, Flack had begun to realize that the art world was a rough one dominated by men. Women simply were not accorded credit for their achievements or, even more distressing, it was assumed that there had never been any important female artists. Flack became aware... that she not only faced a struggle in her art, but that she was also going to be involved in a political struggle. In the ensuing years Flack has painted from a female point of view. It is hard to know if she is interpreting the world as a woman or intentionally politcizing. Suffice it to say that her vision is totally different from that of the other major Photo-Realists, all of who (s) are men." (**Meisel** 1981 p242)

Whereas the previous pictures, with skin-like surfaces, alluded to the external body, the forms in *Vanitas* were more evocative of the internal body and organs. The shift from the external to the internal occurred unconsciously but interestingly, parallelled formal shifts in object-ground relations. Formerly, the 'body bits' were embedded on the surface of the picture plane, in this piece, the objects appeared to be compressed behind. The arrangement of the forms as if trapped under the picture plane was arrived at as an indirect reference to the transparency, and resistance, of the glass support,[191] but was also influenced by Ingres' portraits in which the women seemed compressed within a very shallow pictorial space. This compression effect brought to his paintings a strongly material presence, both alluring and disturbing in its intensity.[192]

Evaluation

The works discussed above were completed within the first year of the project. Within them I felt that I had achieved some of the project's formal objectives. The use of repetition, all-over compositions, equal weighting of parts and the compressed figure-ground relationship all contributed to the visual complexity I sought to disrupt the distant and ocular-centric viewpoint. The detailed and dense surfaces, and compressed pictorial space, notable particularly in the earlier works, contributed further to this complexity. The success of individual works, of course, varied but I felt that the earlier two-panelled paintings had a stronger emotional resonance than the later ones. What was significant about these images was their strong material presence. This effect I wanted to explore further.

Yet although I felt satisfaction with formal successes I was disillusioned with

[191] To emphasise the picture plane as a transparent layer I painted a reflection on the surface of each panel.

[192] All pictures, both paintings and prints, have been motivated by a desire to create a similar effect. The degree to which this has been successful varies.

the imagery. The work *Vanitas* failed to encapsulate the emotional intensity I sought and its imagery, although sensually suggestive, seemed somewhat ordinary. The disillusionment I felt with regard to this work brought to the fore an evaluation of my working methods. One problem was the habitual way I had been sourcing working material, and further, the manner of its configuration. My dependence upon 'finding' the right source material was limiting the specificity of imagery. This problem was compounded by the circumscribed manner in which I had been employing the tools of Photoshop. Like all beginners, I had been using the application as a sophisticated collage tool rather than exploring its potential to work images in other ways.

These problems coincided with my reading of Rosemary Betterton's observations on the way that the technically precise style, employed by the painter Georgia O'Keefe, counters the sensuality of her subject matter. Her pictures allude to the female body, but it "is a body held in check and rendered impenetrable by the technical control over the process of painting."[193] Betterton's proposition left me wondering whether it was possible to make more explicit representations of the naked female body, but whether such representations could be 'held in check' through a highly detailed style, dense pictorial space, and compressed figure-ground relations.

I had determined a direction for imagery; the source material remained a problem. With my photographic skills at bare minimum I was less than confident of my ability to capture original material. As a start I began experimentation with some 'appropriated' video footage of a dancing female figure. From a sequence of stills I produced several digital images, and while the imagery again seemed ordinary, the process of working more

[193] **Betterton** 1996 p91.

directly with the figure was enticing.[194] In parallel with the computer work I executed a large graphite drawing based on digitally distorted photographs of my arms. These drawings were also never resolved pictorially, but they were significant for two reasons. They were the first works in which I used my own body directly as subject matter, and, they rekindled a past interest in gesture.[195] Elements of both the digital images and the graphic works suggested openings for future work.

Fig 39. *Gloves*, 1998

Phase Two: 1999

Phase two incorporated works from the middle stage of the project. Selected works from this period were exhibited in *The Shell Fremantle Print Prize*, Fremantle, 1999 and in solo exhibitions *Good Girl*, CAST Gallery, Hobart, 1999 and First Draft Galleries, Sydney, 2000. Progress was disseminated by conference paper at *Sensation 2: Images, Bodies and New Trajectories*, National Postgraduate Conference, COFA, UNSW, Sydney, 2000.[196] The

[194] Little resolved work came out of these experiments. The only work to be reproduced beyond the computer screen was a double-image print entitled *Dance*. Although the depicted figure is severely cropped it is nevertheless a more direct representation of the body than the abstracted body parts found in earlier paintings.

[195] I had explored gesture in a series of works executed between 1992-3. See as examples works exhibited in *The Flower*, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart 1992.

[196] The paper entitled *Beyond Perspectivalism: Sensuality and Detachment in Images of the Female Body* has been written into the exegesis. It was useful in clarifying my

majority of pieces produced within this phase were resolved as oil paintings on glass. I continued to experience difficulties in obtaining satisfactory results in digital prints.

Objectives

The objective in phase two was to investigate possibilities for representing female subjectivity through imagery of a more explicit nature. A second goal was to investigate further, spatial and surface effects in order to increase the tactile dimensions of imagery. Both objectives were determined by the search for alternate forms of representation at variance with representation modes that privilege the objective and voyeuristic gaze of the spectator.

The plan was to pursue these objectives through additional investigations into spatial and formal arrangements, and through stylistic considerations. I had again been deliberating on the formal mechanisms that construct the tactile dimensions of Ingres' pictures - the compressed almost resilient pictorial space, the distortion of his subject's bodies, and the attention to surface detail. These devices offered possibilities for making representational pictures of a complex nature, the intricacy of which could disrupt stereotypical patterns of looking.

Formal and Technical Approaches

To employ my body as subject seemed logical in its convenience. It also provided opportunities for direct expression. My preference to control the 'shoot' led to the decision to trial a digital video camera. I felt that by setting the camera on a tripod in the privacy of my studio I could explore concepts with less inhibition. The digital camera also facilitated production and specificity; footage could be readily recorded, down loaded and sorted

interest in the portrait paintings of Ingres.

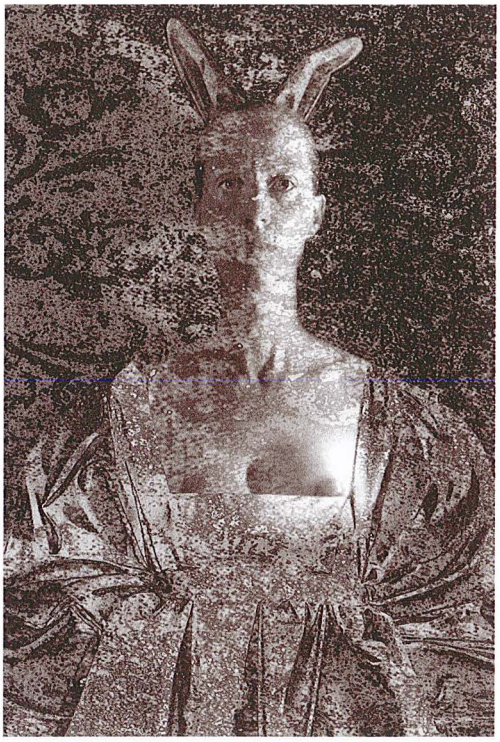

Fig 40. *Alice*, 1999

for potential stills, with re-shoots taken as required. The convenience of this process made up for two shortfalls - my inexperience with both lighting and camera angles, and the loss of detail through the low resolution of the digital video camera.[197]

The first series of images resulting from this process were confronting. The fact that it was my body was one issue; more importantly, over several years my pictures had been increasingly moving towards more abstracted imagery and the new overt representation seemed extremely literal. Instinctively I began to break down the form of the body, employing Photoshop to merge the figure within decorative grounds.[198] The further I went along this track the more reductive the form became, emerging finally as a linear outline that all but disappeared into a patterned surface. At this

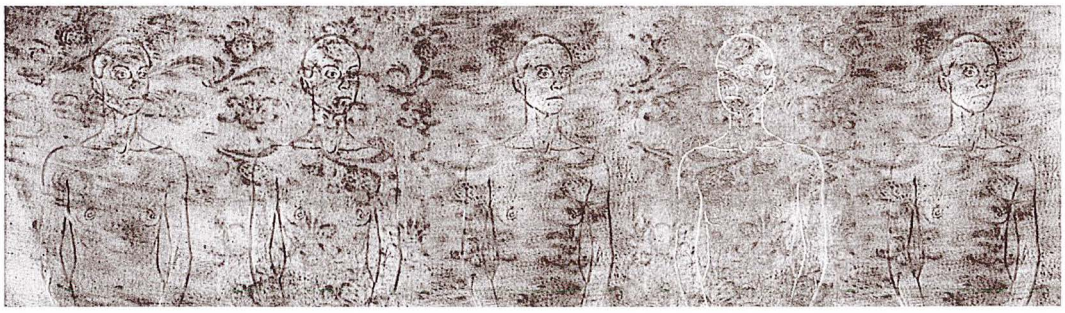

Fig 41 *Frieze*, 1998

[197] Over time the low resolution contributed to experimentation into image layering and printing techniques through attempts to disguise the poor quality of source imagery.

[198] Most of the images worked at this early stage remained as digital files although several such as *Frieze* and *Duo* were trialed as large format digital prints.

point I faced two realisations. Firstly, I had returned to well-rehearsed ways of organising figure and ground relationships and, secondly, this formal relationship brought to the pictures unwanted readings. The figure lying parallel to the picture plane was stiff and reticent and its integration within the patterned surface meant that the figure's presence was lost. Although I wanted a strong relationship between figure and ground I wanted the body to hold its own form. It was at this point that I returned to reconsider the 'Object' paintings. I liked the way in which the modelled forms in these paintings seemed to expand out of, but recede into, the dense space encasing them. The ambiguity, suggested by these dense spatial fields, offered the potential for the figures to exist in a more embodied sense. I commenced experimentation into loosening the figure from the ground but not losing sight of the relationship between the two.

The different approach required a reconsideration of source material. The upright postures I had initial employed were unsuitable, as I wanted to create the impression of bodies breaking *through* the pictorial space. I realised I had been employing the digital camera somewhat like a still camera, adopting a posture and recording small variations within it; now I began instead to document how my body interacted *within* space. Although a logical and a somewhat obvious step, this was a crucial shift for me. Subconsciously and habitually I had long organised my imagery like a series of theatre flats lying parallel to the picture plane. Likewise I had been imagining the figure as two-dimensional. I began now to envisage the flats rotating, drawing forms back into the picture's depths rather than along its surface. Moving in front of the camera made me *feel* my body within space, its actions bringing to the process a more immediate physical relationship to the construction of the work. In response to this shift I began to employ gestures that indicated a link to the physical body; actions such as blowing, licking, squeezing, laughing and screaming.

These image developments required further formal orchestration to resolve them pictorially. Until then, methods for constructing images using

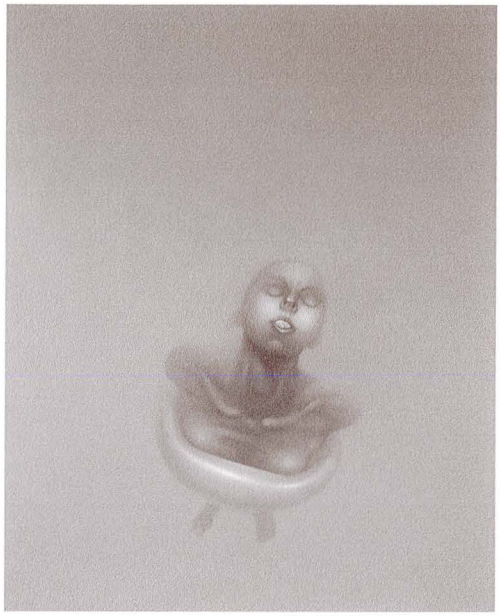

Fig 42. *Nymph*, 1999

Photoshop had been confined to simple arrangements between two or three layers. I now began to search for ways of recreating digitally, the painted spaces of the 'Object' pictures. I experimented with layering processes using both semi-transparent and opaque layers. I found I could recreate processes analogous to my painting techniques. Images could be worked up, pushed back, layered and glazed and reworked. This method, at times incorporating up to twenty digital 'washes', provided dense atmospheric, yet semi-opaque, grounds that encapsulated the figures within its density. In parallel with these investigations I began explorations into distortion effects, employing these to pull the figures further into and out of the pictorial space, and exaggerating their physical proportions.[199] Although somewhat tentative compared to later experiments, I found these subtle manipulations added visual interest and provided a further psychological element to imagery. The naked figures slipping towards the frontal plane of the canvas also challenged traditional pictorial space; their proximity to the viewer provokes an intimacy by demanding a response to their presence.

The spatial effects derived within computer imagery, however, did not translate into print media and the large even-toned areas rendered by the inks were flat and uninspiring. Poor print quality was a direct result of the low resolution of images captured by the video camera, and the 'stress'

[199] Refer for example to arms and torso of *Kewpie*; arm of *Swimmer*; head and tongue of *Nymph*; torso shoulder and tongue of *Mute*; heads of *Nanny* and *Miss*

placed on them through manipulation in Photoshop. When enlarged the artefacts created as a result of these factors, barely perceivable on screen, produced unattractive marks and coarse colour registration.[200] This meant that, although the images were resolved with regard to composition, they required the material substance of paint to fulfil their potential.

Specific Works

Good Girl Mute

Mute was the first resolved image within a series of works grouped under the title 'Good Girl'. The progenitor exists in an image of a figure standing erectly - her form disrupted by the imprint of pattern. In the latter version the naked female figure is more confronting, her form unadorned. She

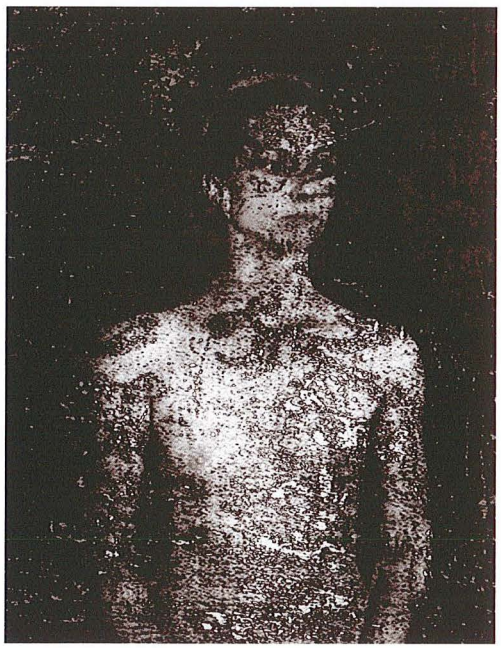

Fig 43. *Good Girl*, 1998

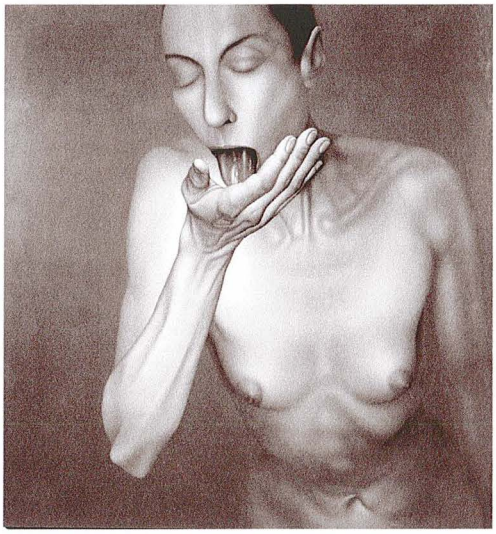

Fig 44. *Mute*, 1999

[200] I had difficulty achieving the subtle tonal variations and the more muted colours I was working with. Considered retrospectively these problems were not only created by image stress and low resolution. Access to updated print technology, inks and paper stock in the latter stage of the project facilitated the correction of these problems.

is leaning slightly forward defiantly licking the palm of her hand. Her figure is subtly distorted to pull her back into a dense space that swallows the lower part of her torso. Her nakedness came as a shock but her compelling nature lead me to paint her image. Her placement at the front of the picture plane, the plasticity of the surface and the impenetrability of the pictorial space were employed to increase the material dimensions of the image and to create a sense of the figure's embodied presence. This 'felt' presence would influences the viewer's relationship to the picture.

Good Girl Kewpie

The figure *Kewpie* is likewise impassive but defiant as she clutches at her left breast. The subject is naked bar a white fur stole that drapes her shoulders. She finds her ancestry in Ingres' portrait of *Caroline Rivière* painted in 1806. It is a disturbing image of a girl with an over-large rather snake-like head, long slanting eyes and a fixed smile. Mademoiselle Rivière seems poised between childhood and

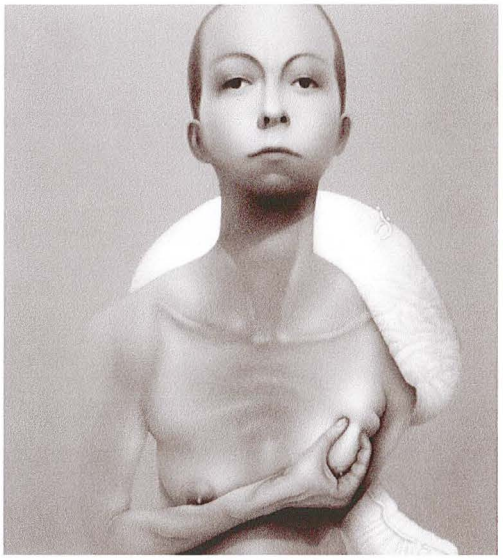

Fig 45. *Kewpie*, 1999

Fig 46. J. A. D. Ingres, *Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière*, 1806

adulthood - her delicate figure only just hinting at her sexuality. Her body is strangely distorted and she stands compressed between a bare suggestion of greenery in front, and a flat, impenetrable darkness behind. The ribbon encircling her slight frame seems to restrict her breathing and the serpentine stole of white swansdown, lined with satin, seems to constrain her movements. The painting *Kewpie* was constructed within a similarly constricted space, the awkwardness of the figure also deriving from both her androgynous sexuality and the distortions that elongate her neck, enlarge her head and narrow her lower torso. The strangeness of her form has been emphasised by composing the figure as if viewed from a low viewpoint that tilts her head and pushes it to the front of the picture plane. The white stole encloses the figure, its lighter tonality compressing her form within a shallow pictorial space. Her wall-eyed gaze, up-front positioning and the precise rendering rebuke efforts to penetrate too closely behind her mask-like composure and her availability.

Breath and Font

The patterned surfaces and figure-ground organisation of these pictures recall the 'Containment' paintings. Their compressed pictorial space, linear surface design and palpable density, however, again form links to Ingres' portraits. At the time I constructed these pictures, I had been considering how the abstract surface patterns of his pictures over-ride readings of spatial depth or volumetric illusionism. The artist's use of surface pattern

Fig 47. *Font*, 1999

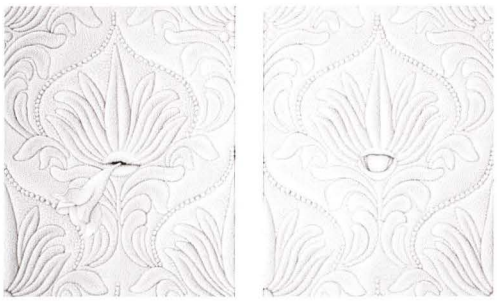

Fig 48. *Breath*, 1999

Fig 49. J.A.D. Ingres, *Marie Marcoz*, 1816

compresses forms against the picture's surface with such insistence that objects flatten and bulge to eliminate all spatial recesses. Within *Breath*, *Font* and *Lick* I sought a similarly contracted pictorial space, one in which the mouths would pant or blow in shallow constricted breaths. The resilient surfaces of these pictures were achieved through successive layers of fine scumbling and thin transparent glazes. Their intense palpability disrupts the gaze.

Evaluation

Investigations undertaken in phase two were important in clarifying both the direction and the formal boundaries of the project. The imagery, I felt, had achieved the tangible qualities I sought, and feedback on work exhibited towards the end of this phase was helpful in confirming these conclusions. Most significant were developments that occurred within the arrangement of forms within pictorial space. The figures existed in an embodied sense and this was important in dissolving the psychological and physical distance between the viewer and the picture. This was critical to future work.

Many images from this phase, initially perceived as potentially exciting, evolved into spectacular flops, and were therefore not developed beyond the computer screen. A problem that I repeatedly encountered was undesirable readings that were suggested by the stance of figures. I found it difficult to avoid stereotypes of gender, not only within posture and body gesture but

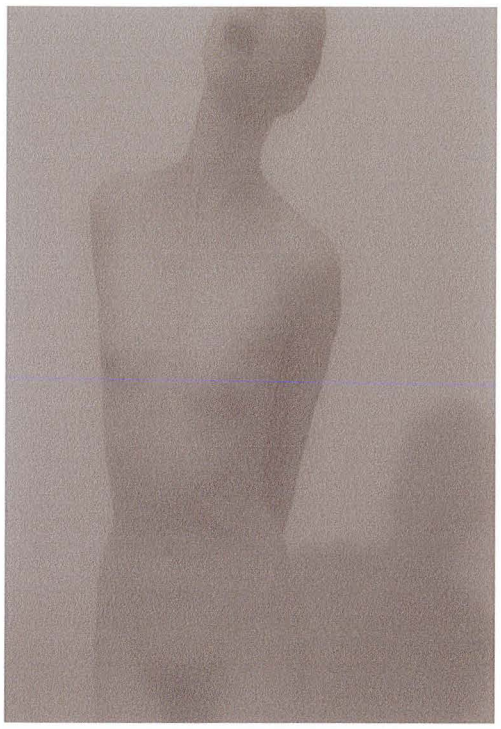

Fig 50. *Transgress*, 1999

Fig 51. *Bridle*, 2000

also within facial expression and the use of props.[201] A second problem was isolated by peer feedback. It seemed that although the pictures evoked the tactility that I perceived as important in disrupting conventional viewing relations, the figures themselves, despite their more embodied form, conveyed a sense of absence.[202] I saw these readings as problematic to my aims. I wanted my figures to convey the sensations of embodied subjectivity and lived experience rather than being confined to deathly silence.

[201] I experimented with various props - masks, hair-pieces, stockings and scarves but most of these were abandoned.

[202] Some comments suggested that this sense of absence evoked further the sense of death.

Phase Three: 2000 and 2001

Phase three incorporated works executed in the final stages of the project. Selected works were exhibited in *The Hobart City Art Prize*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 2001 and *The Australian Paper Awards*, Melbourne Arts Centre, 2001. Progress was delivered by paper at *latest additions*, Postgraduate Conference, ANU, Canberra 2001.[203] All works produced within this phase were resolved as large format digital prints.

Objectives

The final groups of works undertaken within this project consolidated key aspects of research undertaken within earlier phases, with one significant change. In general terms the objective was to continue investigations into gesture and tactility. These I considered fundamental to my aims. However, to overcome the reticence of former pictures I set an additional goal. I wanted to create pictures that indicated embodied subjectivity in a more lived and 'felt' sense.

In terms of the material quality of pictures, investigations into detail, surface character and pictorial space remained pivotal. In addition, I wanted to explore humour, distortion and viewpoint as devices through which to disrupt the singular gaze.

Formal and Technical Approaches

The first two works produced within these objectives were critical in defining the concluding work. Image-wise the pictures are radically different, but each grew from the intention to make pictures that would confound the distant and detached viewpoint. The first, entitled *Porca 1*, depicts a naked

[203] The paper entitled *Surface and Tactility: New Approaches to Representing the Female Body* addressed the processes I employ to achieve tactile surfaces within my digital prints.

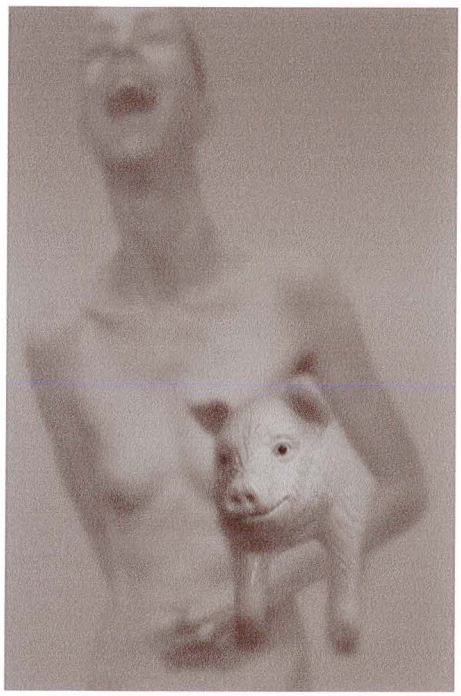

Fig 52. *Porca 1*, 2000

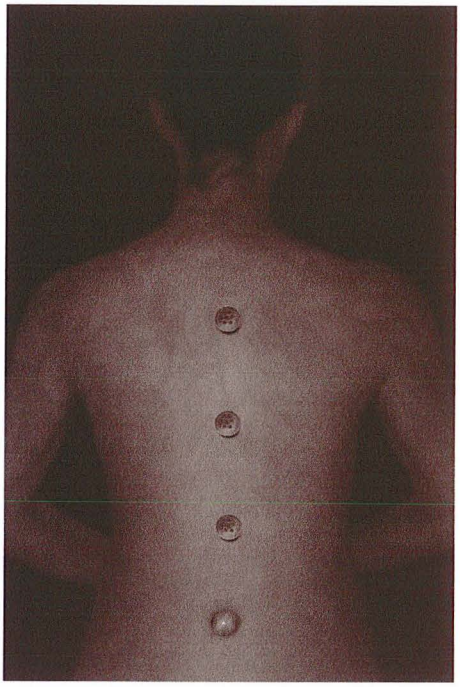

Fig 53. *My First Words*, 2000

woman, the upper part of her torso placed high within the picture plane. She is leaning back slightly, laughing loudly, and under her arm she clutches a large plastic pig. Although her eyes are closed, the intense pink tonality of the picture, and the figure's assertive stature and boisterous laughter, demand our attention. The second image, *My First Words*, is more subdued. The figure, with her back turned towards the viewer, is modest, but her slightly 'inflated' torso and the patterned veining imprinted on her skin, evokes a tactile but uneasy sensuality. The commanding gesture of *Porca 1* disrupts conventional subject/object viewing relations because of the demands it places on the viewer. Likewise the material dimensions of *My First Words* draws the viewer into a sensory encounter that counteracts a remote positioning. Both pictures disrupt the passive/dominant relations of customary depictures of women's bodies through their overshadowing of the pleasures of ideal reflection. Formally the pictures find commonality through their dense surface and compressed pictorial space.

The making of these two prints was notable because they determined the

resolution of the project; their successful output as prints contributed to my decision to work exclusively within digital print media. Significant were the layering processes used in their construction. These were more refined and sophisticated than those employed in former work, and the visual complexity these processes brought to imagery provided them with a convincing tangible quality. In combination with technical advances in the area of printing, this quality enabled me to accomplish, within prints, the intensity of surface I had been seeking. There was another factor that influenced my decision to work totally within print media. I had, at the time, been considering integrating highly detailed and intricate patterning within imagery as a means of achieving more evocative and resonant surfaces, but had been grappling with the difficulty of reproducing such particularity in painting. Print media provided the possibility of realising this.

Porca 1 and *My First Words* took the project to a new level. I could for the first time envisage the execution of my ideas in both conceptual and formal terms.

Specific Works

From this point, investigations fell into two distinct but related areas, the differences between them indicated by the variations in pictorial form set up by the two prints discussed above.

The 'Pig' Prints

From an early age I acquired the unfortunate manner of snorting when I laughed. Furthermore my natural laugh was boisterous. The force of my laugh, and its accompanying involuntary vocalisation, engendered within me an anxiety about laughing in public, and I developed the habit of covering my mouth when I did so. My unwillingness to laugh arose from a conviction that, not only was my laughter vulgar and loud, but its raucousness reflected

Fig 54. *Galumph*, 2001

a 'coarseness' in my overall behaviour that was socially unacceptable. The images *Porca 1*, *Porca 2*, *Galumph*, *Bounce* and *Riding the Skimmington*[204] originated in these feelings. Although separate in form, the toy pig and the laughing female figure, were in my mind, two sides of the same coin.[205] The pig, through its registration of disgusting mannerisms, carried the sentiments outlined above, while the gesture of the figure indicated a desire to laugh in the face of standards that dictated acceptable behaviour.

At this time, I came across Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's analysis of the symbolism of the pig in social discourse.[206] The authors describe how the pig has, throughout western history, come to symbolise 'low' discourses and to epitomise the 'lower stratum' of society. They argue that the pig's place within society has, primarily, been one of 'displaced abjection', its 'lowness' providing even the lowest stratum of society with a 'body' against

[204] This title refers to an old English practice of making an example of nagging wives by forming a procession through the village accompanied by rough music to ridicule the offender. Of this procession Brewers Dictionary of Phase and Fable write: "A man, mounted on a horse with a distaff in his hand, rode behind the woman with his face to the horse's tail, while the woman beat him about the jowls with a ladle. As the procession passed a house where the woman was paramount the participants gave the threshold a sweep." The origin of the term 'skimmington' is uncertain, but Brewers cite an illustration from 1639 of a woman assailing her husband with a skimming-ladle.

[205] I tried several versions of 'pig' pictures omitting the figure and using only the pig, but I felt the visual link between the figure and the toy animal I felt was more evocative of what I was attempting to convey.

[206] "The Fair, the Pig, Authorship', pp27-79 in Stallybrass and White 1986.

which humans can assert their power. The metaphoric relationship between pigs and humans, the authors argue, is an old one: "The gross pink, hairless body wallowing in its own filth and eating random remains and slops is too close to the human not to have served as an efficient metaphor throughout history."[207]

While pigs have a metaphorical relationship with humankind in general, they also have particular historical correspondence with women, because traditionally, both have held a lowly position within social hierarchies. For example, in early records of Greek and Latin slang the words 'porcus' and 'porcellus' are repeatedly used to describe the female genitalia; and in Attic Comedy, prostitutes were called 'pig merchants'. These women were treated with the same standing as pigs, their bodies pierced top to tail by meat-roasting spits. J. Henderson records further references to pigs and women's genitalia in the writings of Varro. He defines 'porcus' as a: "nursery word used by women, especially nurses, (to refer to) ... the pudenda of little girls."[208] The analogy between women and pigs extends also to the upbringing of female children. The 'rules' of civilised conduct and good manners dictate that girls must learn to distinguish themselves from the swinish, the piggish, the hog-like. The young girl: "must not 'eat like a pig';

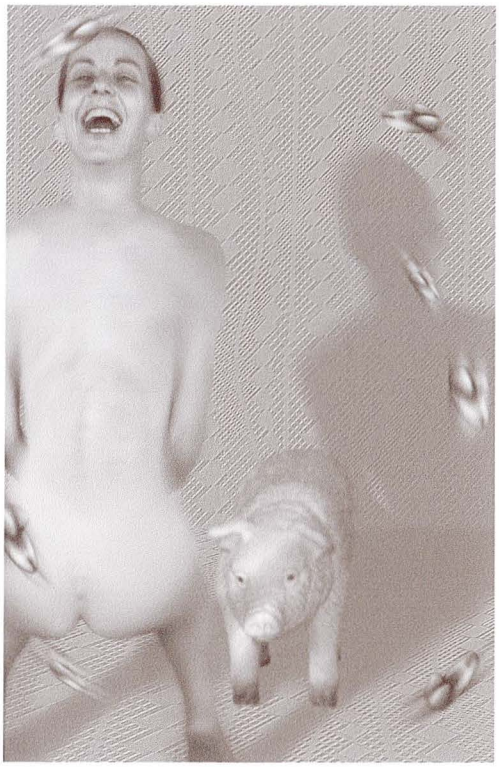

Fig 55. *Riding the Skimmington*, 2001

[207] **Stallybrass and White** 1986 p88.

[208] **Henderson, J**, quoted by **Stallybrass and White** 1986 p45.

she must not slouch at the table; she must not get food on herself".[209] Alice, of Wonderland, exemplifies these expectations in her comment to the Duchess' baby when it grunts at her. "That's not at all a proper way of expressing yourself ... if you're going to turn into a pig ... I'll have nothing more to do with you", she retorts.[210] In their book Stallybrass and White show how the vertical axis of the body is important in the education of the female child. As she grow up she is "cleaned up, the lower bodily stratum is regulated or denied by the correct posture - 'stand straight, don't squat, don't kneel' on all fours, and by the censoring of lower 'bodily' references along with bodily wastes";[211] references to such clearly sublimated as 'unmentionables'.

The series of 'pig' prints encompass, and subvert, these ideas. The laugh was employed to acknowledge, but simultaneously, snub conventions of behaviour, and the association of women with pigs. For all but *Porca 1*, I employed a still camera rather than the digital video camera because the decision to work in print media bought to the fore the problem of the video's low resolution. The work required the greater definition and clarity of photographic imagery to enlarge them to scale. The photographing of this series of images was, for me, the most 'performative' of all works. The complexity of the poses and their set-up, together with the enactment of the laugh made the works extremely physical and this corporeality, I feel, is conveyed within the finished images. The formal construction of these pictures was straightforward, although several of the figures had to be created as composites, because I was unable to capture within a single image, the specific posture I required. The low viewpoint was utilised to bring focus to the lower body and again bring emphasis to embodied subjectivity. As with former imagery the pictures acquired their spatial

[209] **Stallybrass and White** 1986 p165.

[210] Quoted by **Stallybrass and White** 1986 p52.

[211] Quoted by **Stallybrass and White** 1986 p145.

density through repeated layering and 'rubbing back' of semi-transparent 'washes' and 'glazes'. This process brought to the prints density of surface and intensity of colour, the resilience of which further disconcerted the viewer's look.

The 'Torso' Prints

Fig 56. *Each Drop*, 2001

A second series of images developed in parallel to the 'pig' pictures.[212] A key feature of these works is the imprint of 'tattoos', 'scarification' and embossed patterns on the skin. There is a further accent on openings and apertures that perforate the surfaces of the torsos. These 'embellishments' converge with, and 'disfigure', the exterior of the body, transgressing the smoothed and unblemished skin of ideal female forms. By marking and imprinting the body these features also bring awareness to its physical form. As with the 'pig' series there is an overall focus on the lower body, an emphasis created principally through cropping.

The processes used to create these images were, by far, the most complex of the whole project. Unlike the 'pig' pictures, I wanted to break down the photographic clarity of these works - to

[212] This group of images includes *Folly*, *Hysteric*, *Well-turned-out*, *Carnival and Lent*, *Sliver*, *Fool-eater*, *Each Drop* and *Every Stitch*.

Fig 57. *Every Stitch*, 2001

bring emphasis to tactile surfaces rather than the exterior form. I worked to diminish the source image through successive layering of textures and patterns. From these layers new forms emerged, their distorted and exaggerated shapes re-moulding the body to confound the ideals of physical beauty. The inflated 'look' of these torsos recall the 'bloated' bodies of Ingres' female figures. They press forward in the picture's space, in some instances, almost seeming to extend beyond its surface. Despite the accent on skin-like surfaces, this swelling effect forces one to think also of the interior of the body. There is a strong sense of something underneath, stretching and expanding the skin. This brings a powerful palpability to the pictures, sensations that I fell are similar to the physical intensity I had achieved in very early work.[213] The viewer is left with a disturbing and uneasy sensation that counters traditional viewing relations and overshadows the pleasures of ideal reflection. Of the works completed within the project I consider these were the most successful in capturing my objectives.

[213] The 'Containment' series including the works: *Bud*, *Kiss* and *Untitled*, all from 1997.

Evaluation

Encapsulated within both the 'pig' and the 'torso' pictures was the sensation of embodied subjectivity and emotional intensity that I had been seeking. Rather than the withdrawn subjectivity of earlier images I felt that the bodies in these works conveyed impressions of their material and actual presence.

Fig 58. *Folly*, 2001

Assimilated also within the pictures were the many incongruous sources that I had drawn upon throughout the project - the photographic and the painterly, factuality and artifice, particularity and abstraction, sensuality and dislocation, surface and depth. Together these create an ambiguous form of representation that, I believe, resists the objective and detached gaze of the observer.

Colour Plates

Selected Works from Examination Exhibition
All works by the artist.

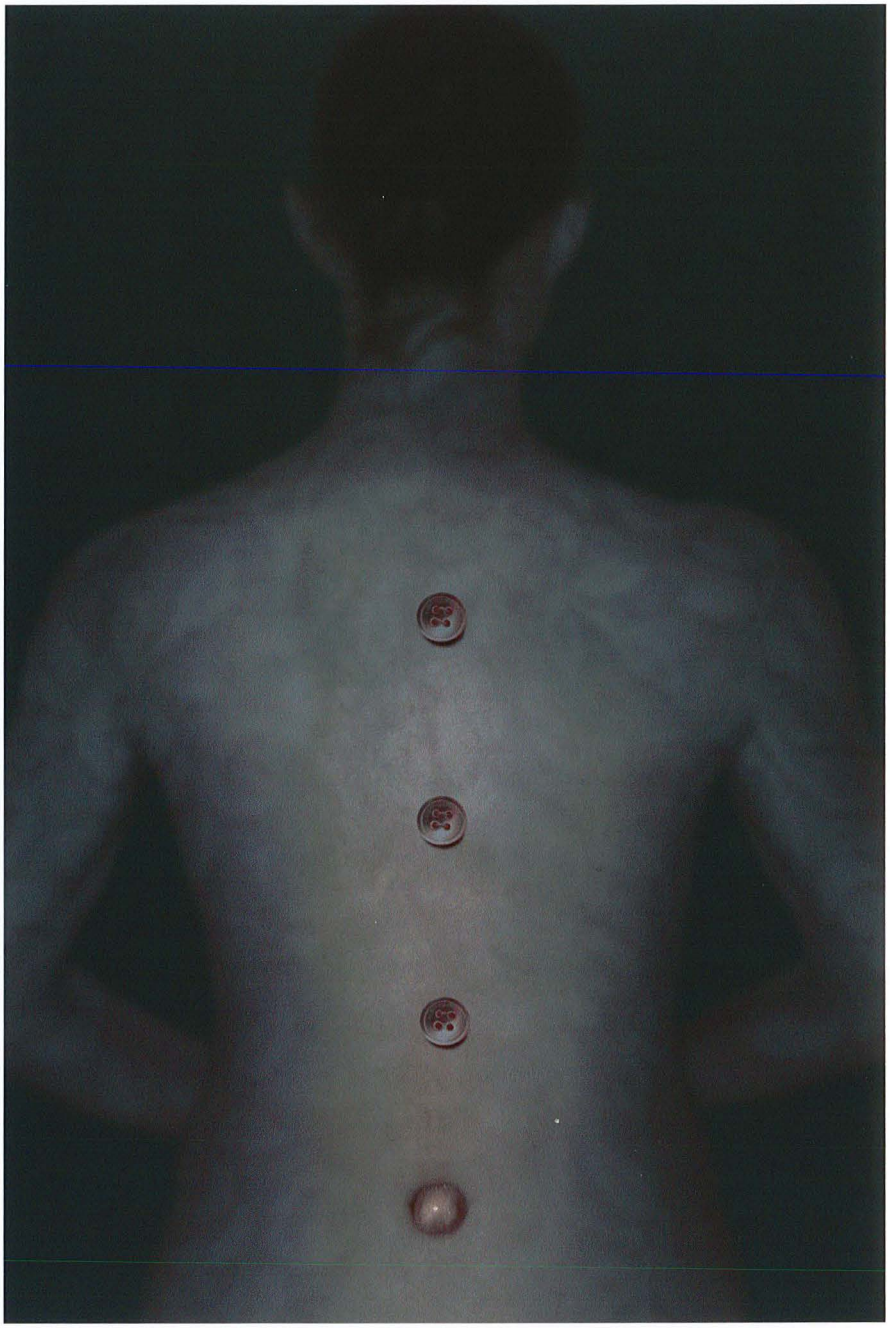

Plate 1. ***My first words***

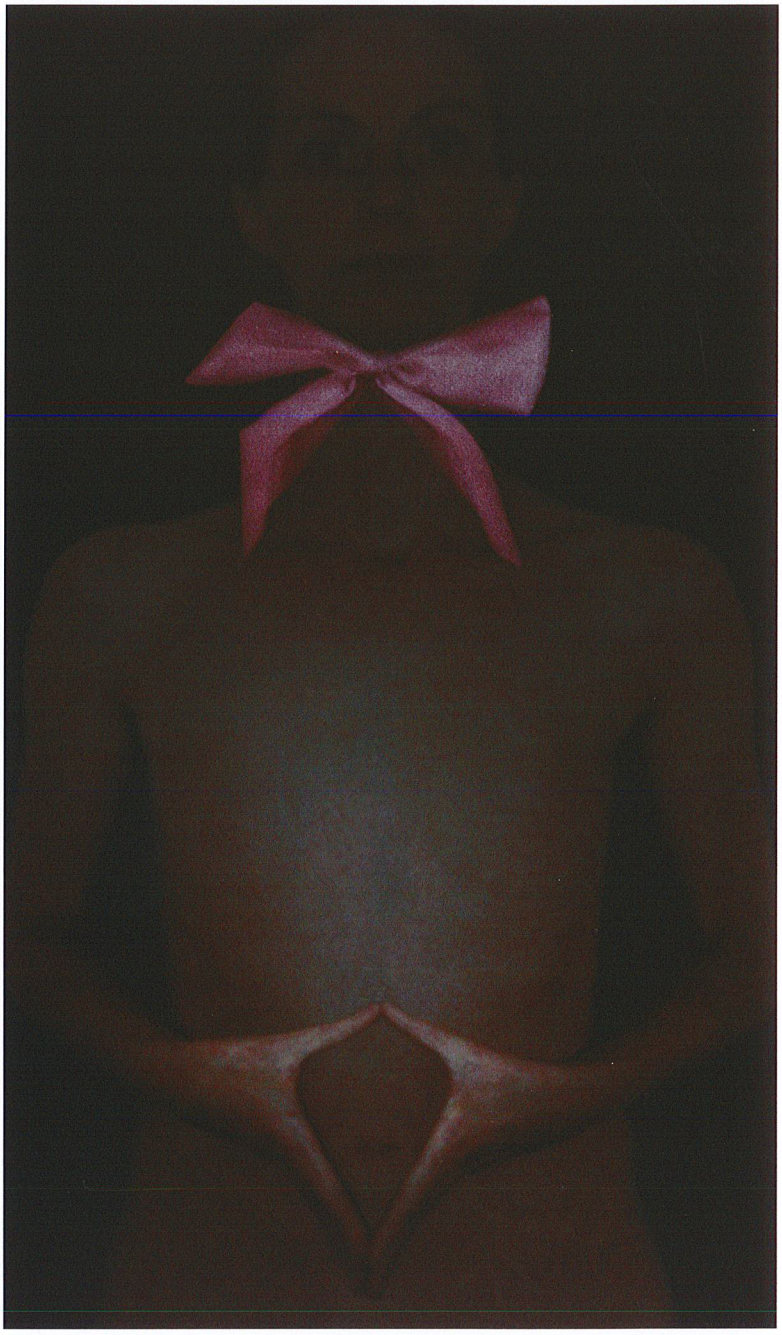

Plate 2. ***Pretty Pretty***

Plate 3. ***Folly***

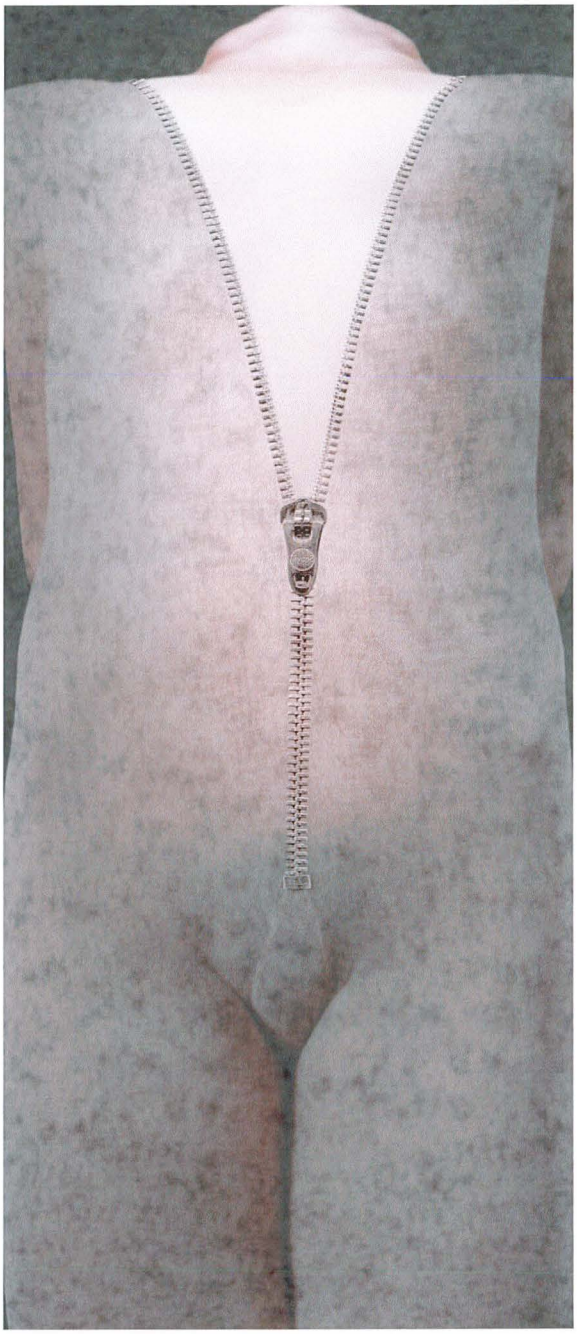

Plate 4. ***Hysteric***

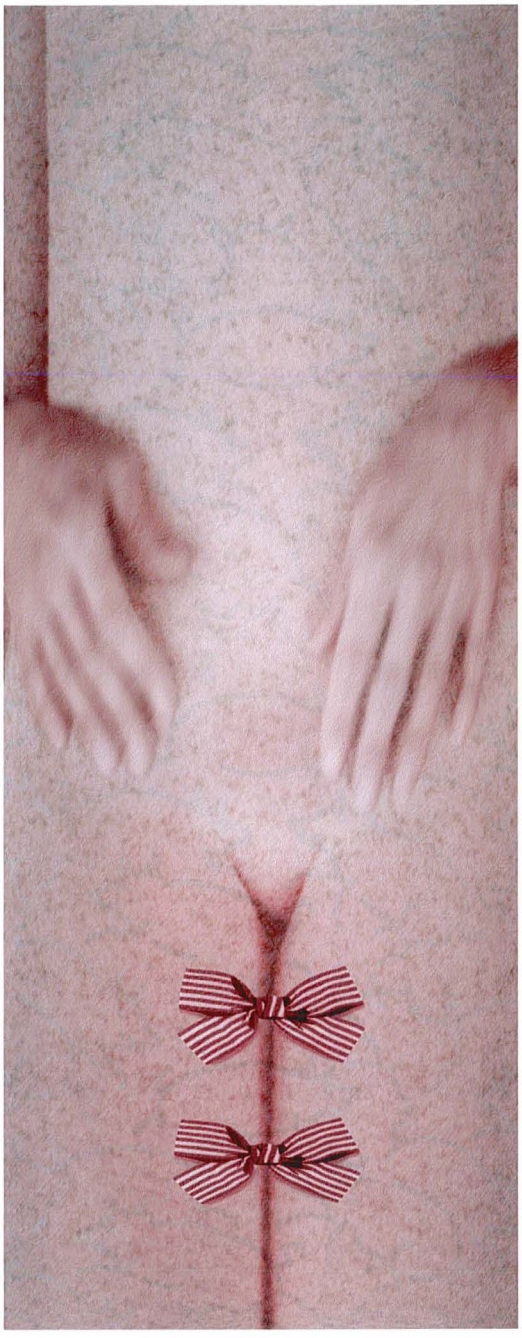

Plate 5. *Well-turned-out*

Plate 6. *Each Drop*

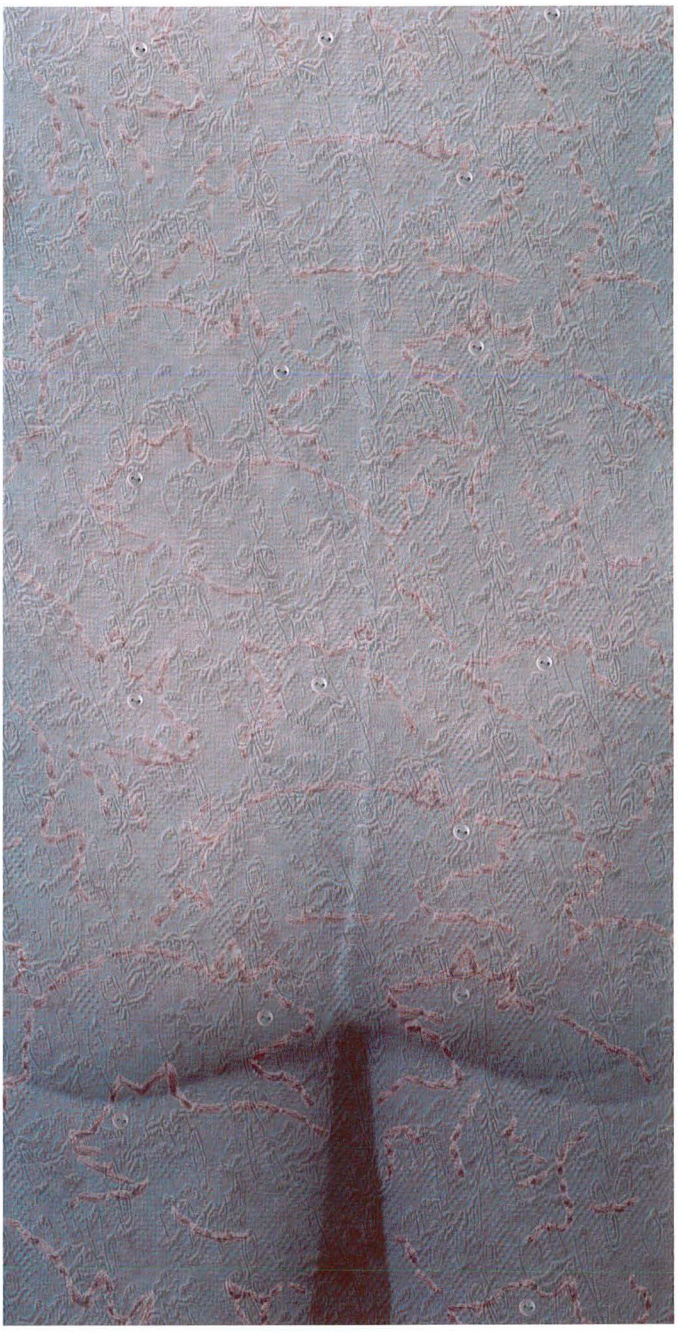

Plate 7. ***Every Stitch***

Plate 8. ***Fool-eater***

Plate 9. ***Sliver***

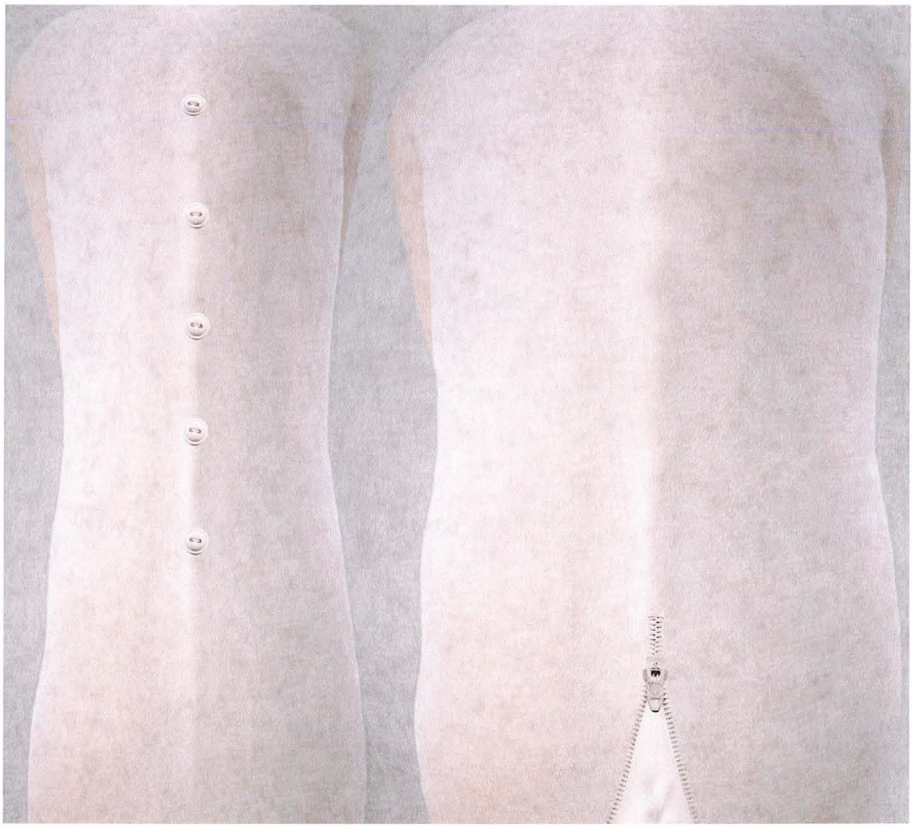

Plate 10. ***Carnival and Lent***

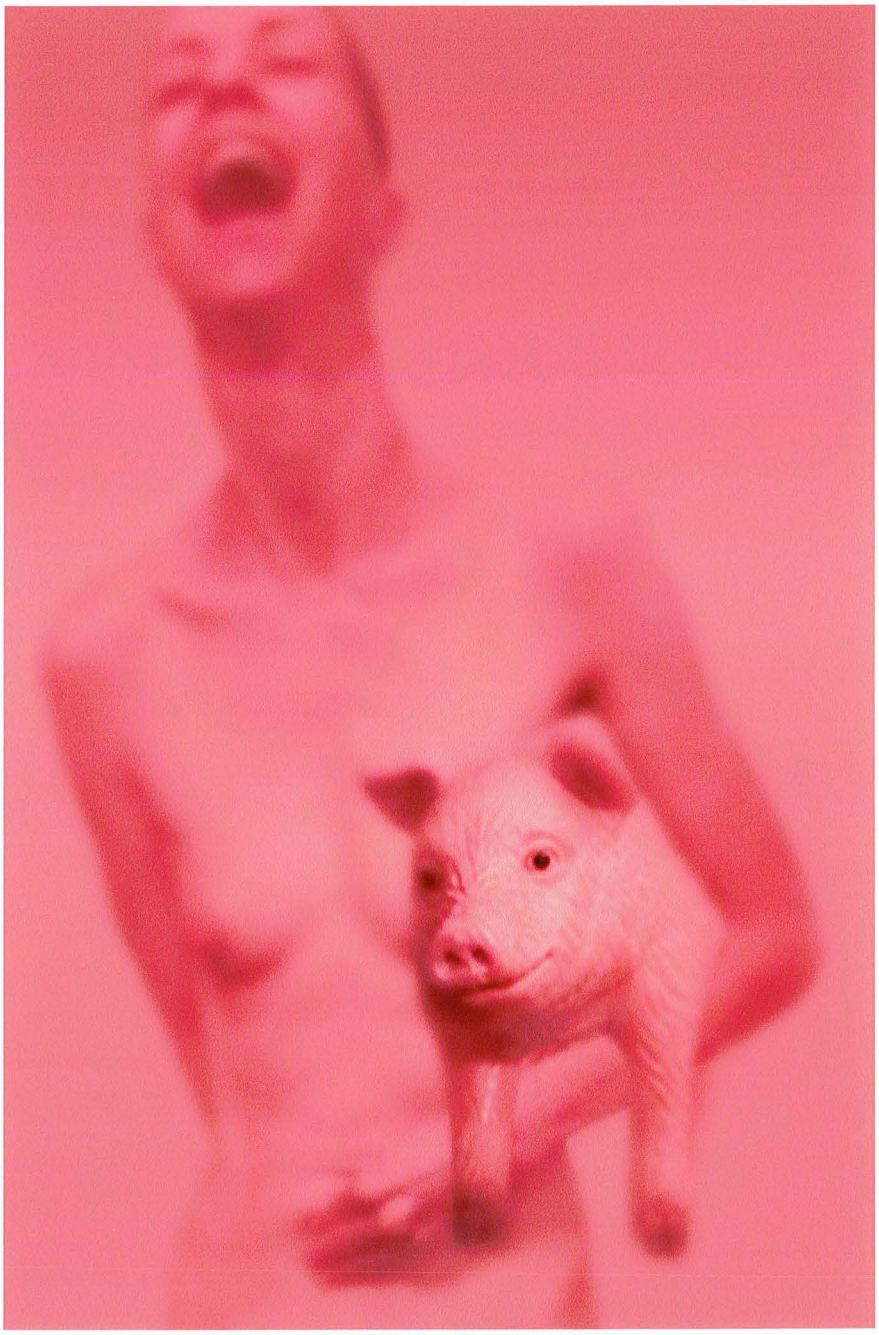

Plate 11. ***Porca 1***

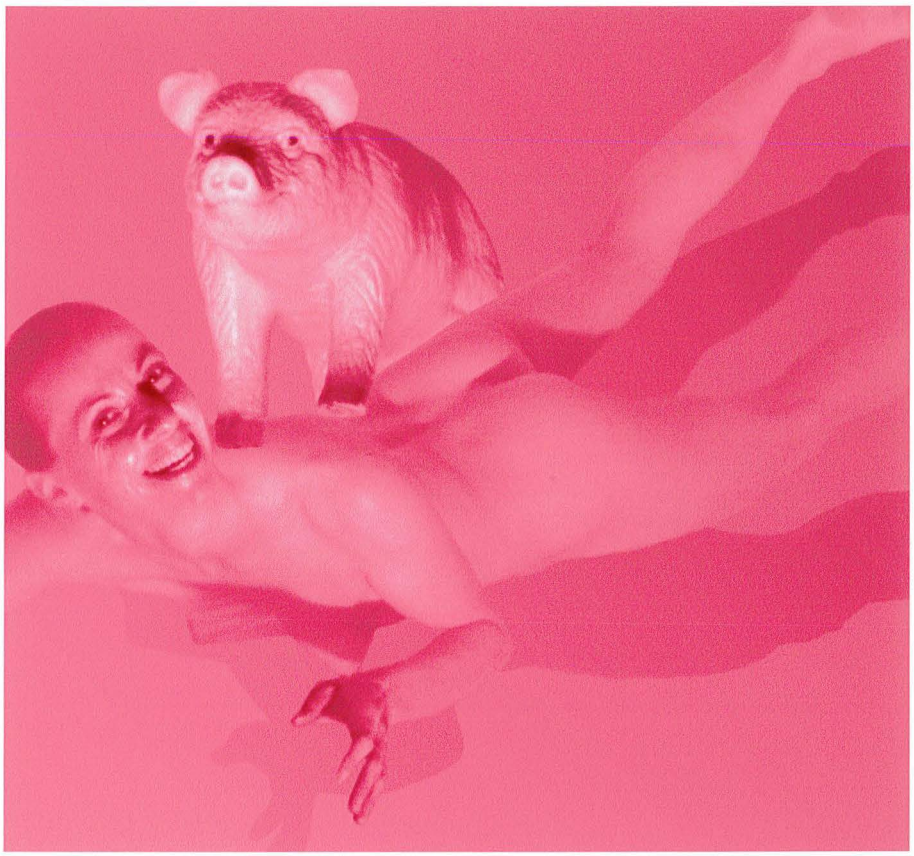

Plate 12. *Porca 2*

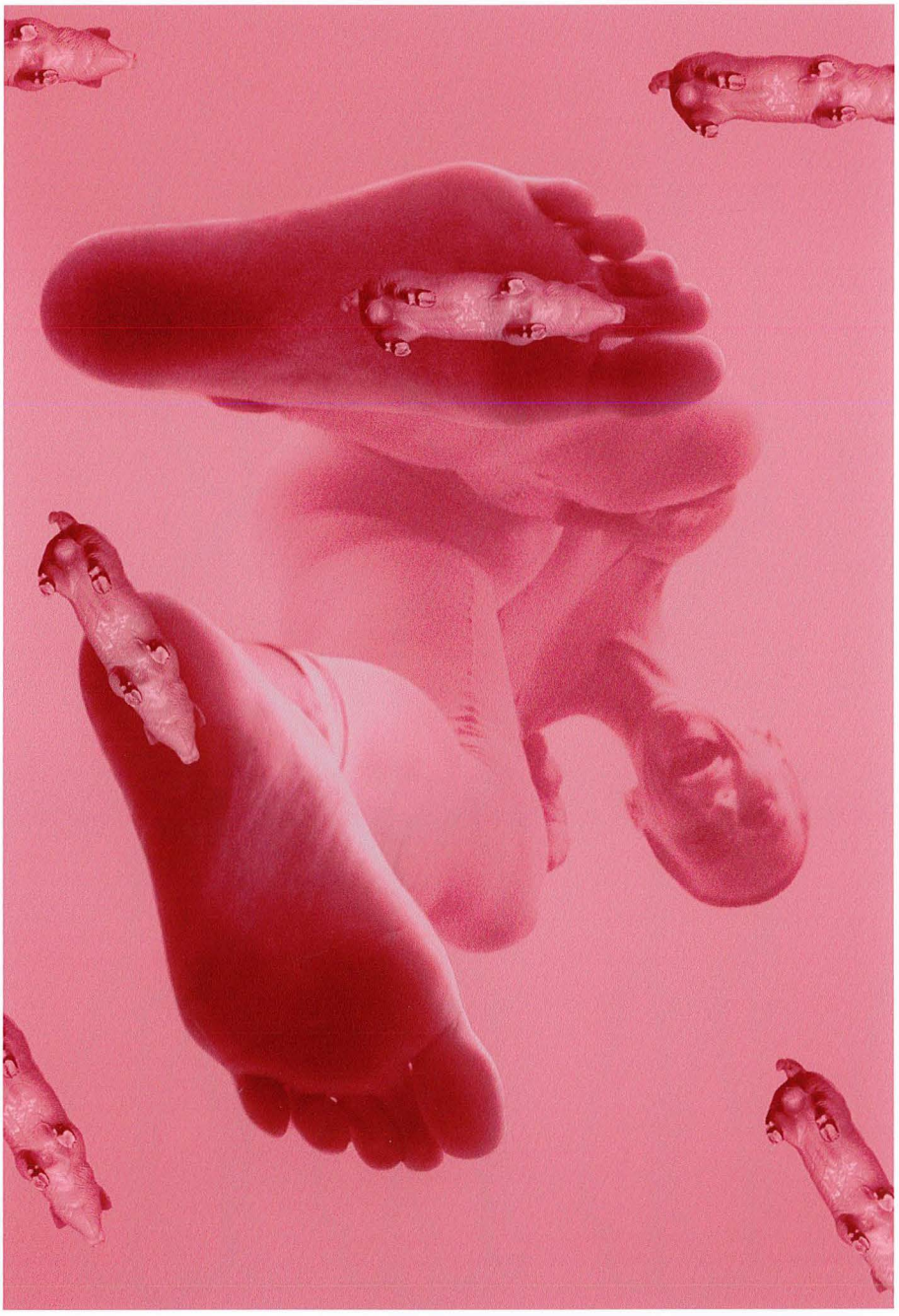

Plate 13. *Galumph*

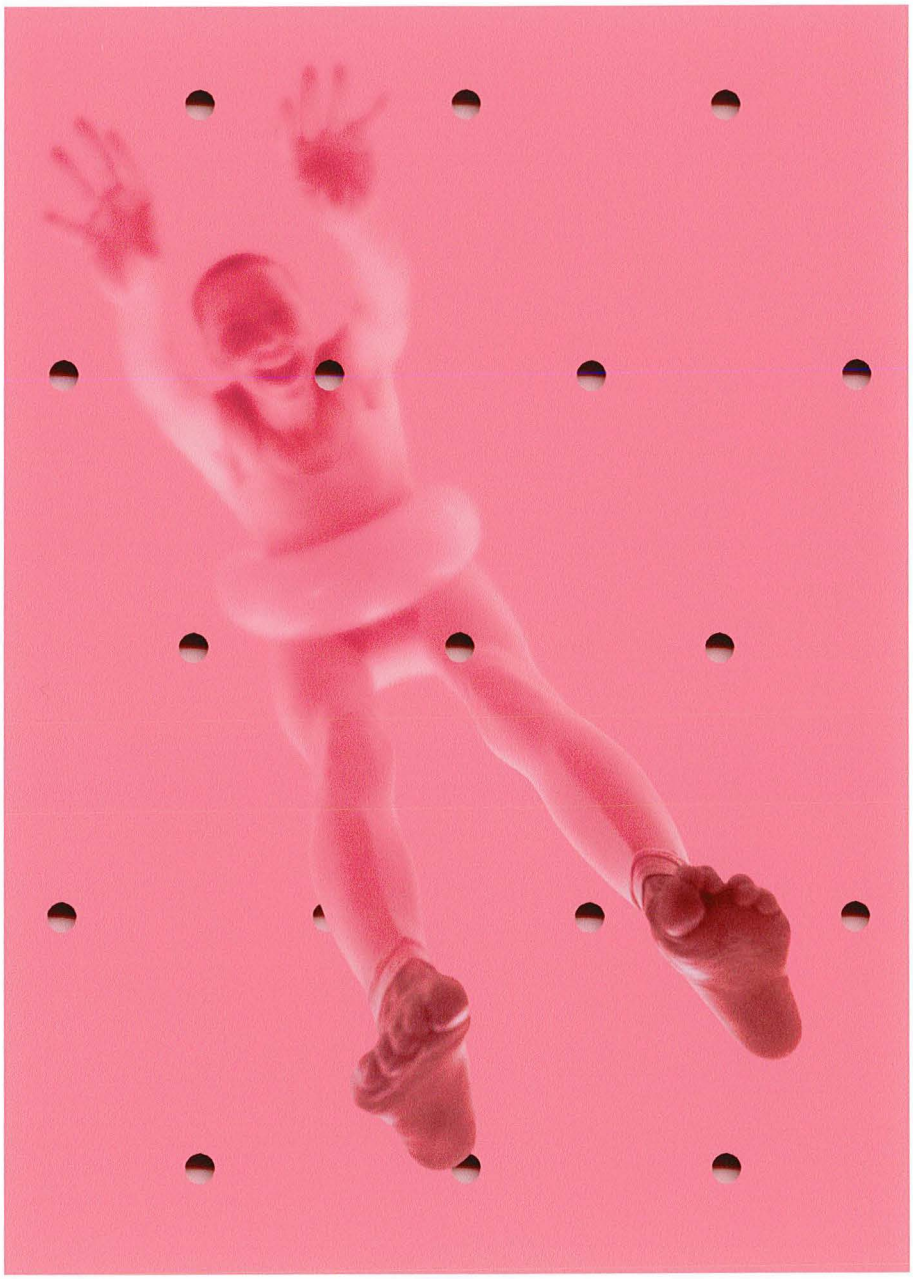

Plate 14. *Bounce*

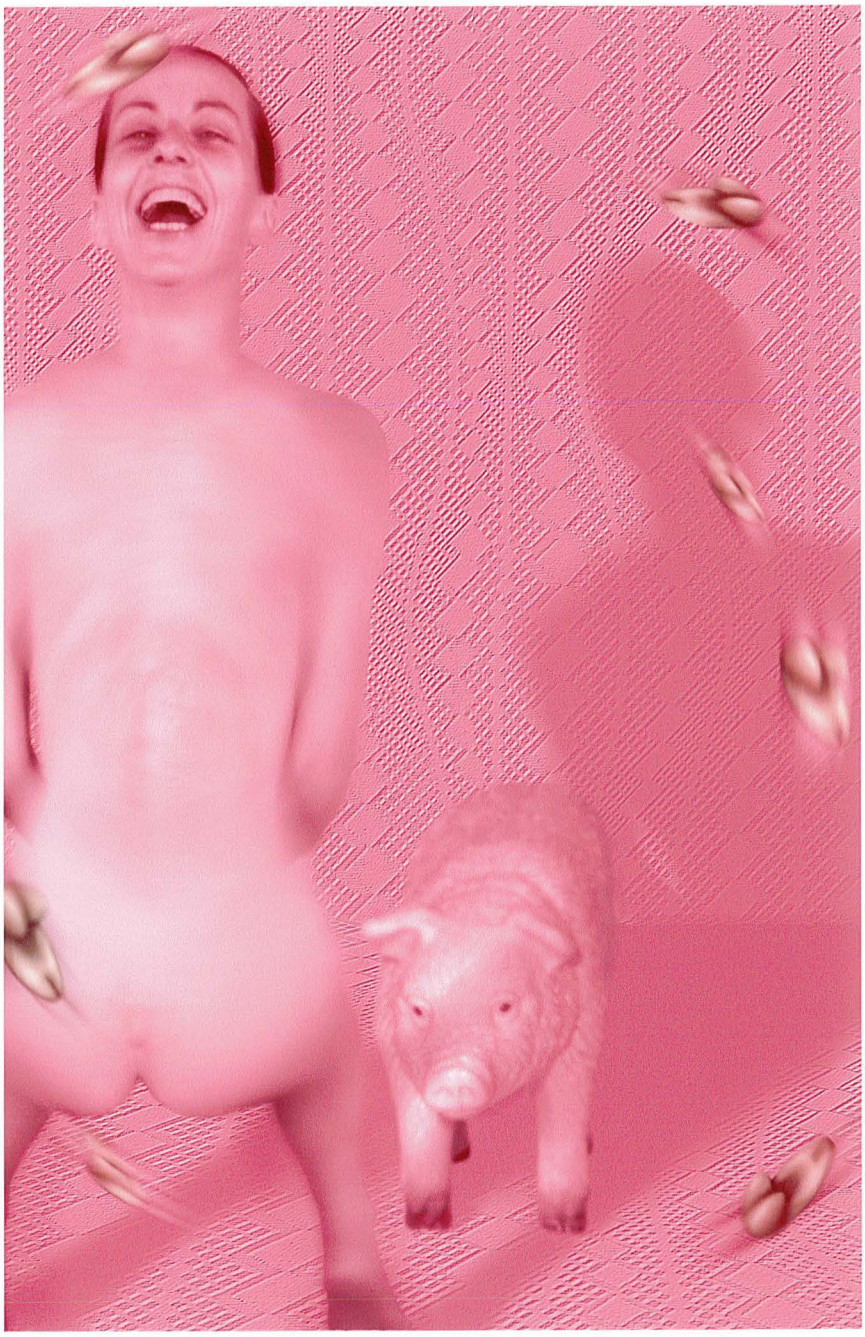

Plate 15. *Rding the Skimmington*

Section Four: Conclusion

Outcomes and Significance

The project has developed strategies for representation through which to explore and expand definitions of subjectivity and sexuality. It has found forms of pictorialism that subvert the conventions of objectification internalised within stereotypical patterns of looking. It argues not for new languages but for alternatives within existing frameworks of representation.

The project is significant for the contribution it makes to the reinstatement of the female sexual body as fertile subject for representation. In general terms its propositions are important to the ongoing task of portraying female subjectivity and for the contributions these make to the broader field of Feminist body art. Additionally, the picturing of the female body in the media of painting and digital print redresses an imbalance in contemporary practice that has favoured time-based, installation and three-dimensional art-forms as preferred media through which to approach issues of both the body and subjectivity.

The outcomes of the research are demonstrated in the artworks chosen for the thesis exhibition. This exhibition is inclusive of key works both prints and paintings, illuminating major developmental points of the project, and the final series of digital prints that brought the research to its conclusion. There is a correlation between the layout of the exhibition and the projects commencement and completion.

In objective terms the outcomes of the project are threefold - conceptual, formal and technical:

- The picturing of embodied subjectivity establishes the conceptual objective; to develop alternative representations of female subjectivity. Importantly the pictures convey the experiences of female subjectivity

rather than depicting women's appearance. The use of distortion and the disfiguring of the surface of the body produced images of the female form at variance with the ideal body, enshrined within conventional pictures of female nudes. Encompassed within the variations in pictorialism is the multi-layered, fragmented and diverse nature of subjectivity. This diversity counters the stereotypical ideals of the female nude that occlude the representation in art of women's multifaceted experiences.

- The formal objectives of the project, to create forms of pictorialism that impede the objective gaze, are confirmed by both the tactile character of the pictures and by the manner of their figuration. The tactile dimensions of imagery, suggested through materiality and surface quality, dissolves the psychological and physical distance between the viewer and the picture. Likewise the fusion of digital media, photography and the layering processes of painting creates an ambiguous pictorialism, the appearance of which confuses normative viewing processes. Variations in representational form reflect further inquiries into the nature of imagery and its reception. Thus for example the use of fragmented and abstracted imagery of the body creates unfamiliar imagery which also discourages conventional viewing relations.
- The methodologies developed for constructing images in multiple layers pushes digital imaging technologies beyond its more usual applications within the areas of photography and the visual mass media. Refinements in these techniques in the later stages of the project subvert the obvious manipulations of the digital imaging process. This led to the production of prints with distinctive surface characteristics. These results make a unique contribution to current art practice.

In subjective terms the project has realised a number of issues that have informed my practice for some years. These achievements, rather than providing closure, have opened up different directions for representation and new approaches to image-making. My interest in surface and what meaning surface qualities can convey has until now led me to create pictures

with little pictorial dimension. The final series of 'torso' pictures brought together within the picture plane both evocative surfaces and a greater sense of form. The layering processes developed for their realisation, and the manner in which these textural layers delineate forms, has opened up alternative avenues for pictorialism. The techniques developed for manipulating imagery have also provided me with new directions. Previously I had depended on paint media to draw in cohesion the many diverse source materials used in the construction of imagery. The sophistication of digital imaging techniques has enabled me to achieve seamlessness within the computer and within print media. This opens up the possibility of incorporating a whole range of new and diverse source materials previously dismissed because of the difficulty of conveying their particularity in paint.

Readings undertaken in parallel with practical work have encouraged a broader perspective of the issues, both conceptual and formal, informing my practice. Of the artists discussed within the context chapter I acknowledge my indebtedness to the painter Ingres whose pictures have been a major source of inspiration. His obsession with detail, surface pattern, compressed pictorial space and distortion brings to his pictures a peculiar tactility and an intensity that places his picture well beyond the realms of conventional imagery of women. I have drawn heavily upon the formal devices employed by Ingres in order to recreate a similar intricate and ambiguous pictorial space, one that draws the viewer into a physical and sensory engagement that counters traditional viewing relations. I hope that this brings to my pictures even a fraction of the psychological and physiological power of his art.

As a final note I need to mention the positioning of myself within the imagery. Although all works completed in phases two and three were derived from photographs of my body, I do not consider the works as self-portraits. This is not to deny the personal nature of the imagery, but rather to acknowledge that the picturing of embodied subjectivity is complex and

cannot be reducible solely to autobiographical and anecdotal references. The picturing of embodied subjectivity provides a framework in which personal, psychological and social dimensions meet. In these pictures the 'seen' takes on an agency of her own and brings recognition to her roles as both seer and seen, and subject and object. From this position she exercises the potential of a subversive reciprocity of vision, of how she sees, rather than how she appears.

"How will you as an audience read her?"[214]

[214] **Meskimmon** 1996 pxv.

Appendices

A: Digital Art Research Facility

DARF, the Digital Art Research Facility, at the School of Art in Hobart was established in late 1995 with the assistance of Australian Research Council grants. It was set up to investigate the potential of digital imaging for experimental image-making. The initial group was made up of a multi-disciplinary team of artists: Bill Hart (multimedia artist), Milan Milojevic (printmaker), Geoff Parr (painter) and Mary Scott (painter). Membership has broadened to include Pat Brassington, Brigita Ozolins, Robin Petterd, Troy Ruffeles and Sarah Ryan. While DARF members cooperate and collaborate in sharing insights and methodologies, and in tackling a myriad of technical problems, they each bring their own unique approaches and each has focused upon different aspects of exploration that maintains integrity to their individual art practice. Work produced within DARF has had many successes in both nationally and international art prizes and awards.

DARF has been supported by the University of Tasmania research infrastructure and the Australian Research Council small and large grant programs. These have allowed for the purchase of both computers and large format printers and have supported research into two major projects:

- "Characterisation of formative digital mesostructures in computer generated images" is investigating the relationship between structure and form in large-scale images with particular application to print.
- "The application of traditional Painting and Printmaking layering techniques to digital printing technologies" developed methodologies for the adaptation of existing computer printing hardware and software to accommodate the traditional techniques of ink and pigment layering used in the fine art disciplines of painting and printmaking.

Appendices

Aspects of the first project, investigating greater variation and versatility in the digital modelling of pictorial surfaces, are ongoing. The second project, which originated within research into the output of imagery through digital print, proved of finite value to my practice. My contribution within this area had been experimenting with layering opaque and transparent pigments and inks in order to achieve richer print quality. This proved a difficult and unpredictable process with the opaque pigments frequently clogging the printer's inkjets. The process of manually layering inks, however, led to enquiry into print variation through layering processes within Photoshop, and ultimately to the development of methodologies used within this project.

B. List of Plates

Selected Works from Examination Exhibition
All works by the artist unless otherwise stated.
Measurements in millimetres and height x width.

1. *My First Words*, 2000, inkjet print, 1200 x 820, framed 1430 x 1040.
2. *Pretty Pretty*, 2000, inkjet print, 1200 x 740, framed 1430 x 960.
3. *Folly*, 2001, inkjet print, 1230 x 800, framed 1460 x 1020.
4. *Hysteric*, 2001, inkjet print, 1400 x 603, framed 1630 x 823.
5. *Well-turned-out*, 2001, inkjet print, 1400 x 550, framed 1630 x 770.
6. *Each Drop*, 2001, inkjet print, 781 x 400, framed 1011 x 620.
7. *Every Stitch*, 2001, inkjet print, 781 x 400, framed 1011 x 620.
8. *Fool-eater*, 2001, inkjet print, 1300 x 390, framed 1530 x 610.
9. *Sliver*, 2001, inkjet print, 1300 x 316, framed 1530 x 536.
10. *Carnival and Lent*, 2001, inkjet print, 1100 x 1000, framed 1330 x 1220.
11. *Porca 1*, 2000, inkjet print, 1200 x 820, framed 1430 x 1040.
12. *Porca 2*, 2000, inkjet print, 1100 x 1185, framed 1330 x 1405.
13. *Galumph*, 2001, inkjet print, 1390 x 950, framed 1620 x 1170.
14. *Bounce*, 2001, inkjet print, 1330 x 950, framed 1560 x 1170.
15. *Riding the Skimmington*, 2001, inkjet print, 1390 x 900, framed 1620 x 1165.

C. List of Illustrations

Measurements in millimetres and height x width.

1. **Eyck**, Jan van, *God: Ghent Polptych Altapiece*, (detail), central interior panel of upper register, 1432, oil on panel, 2122 x 831.
2. **Laurana**, Luciano, *Architectural Perspective*, Baltimore Panel, c1575, oil on panel, 220 x 774.
3. **Titian**, *Venus and Cupid*, c1550, oil on canvas, 990 x 2420.
4. **Turner**, J. M. W. *Light and Colour After the Morning Deluge*, 1843, oil on canvas, 787 x 787.
5. **Claesz**, Willem, *Still Life with Nautilus Goblet*, 1649, oil on wood 493 x 682mm.
6. **Remps**, Domenico, (attributed to), *Cabinet of Curiosities*, (detail), late17th century, oil on canvas 1350 x 985.
7. **Newman**, Barnett, *Joshua*, 1950, oil on canvas, 915 x 635.
8. **Estes**, Richard, *Central Savings*, 1975, oil on canvas, 813 x 1085.
9. **Estes**, Richard, *Thom McAn*. 1974, oil on canvas, 813 x 1085.
10. **Ingres**, J. A. D. *Bather of Valpinçon*, 1808, oil on canvas, 1460 x 970.
11. **Ingres**, J. A. D. *Marie-Clothilde-Inès de Foucauld, Madame Moitessier*, (seated), 1856, oil on canvas, 1200 x 920.
12. **Ingres**, J. A. D. *Marie-Francoise Beauregard, Madame Rivière*, 1806, oil on canvas, 1150 x 890.
13. **Ingres**, J. A. D. *Cécile Bouchet, Madame Panckoucke*, 1811, oil on canvas, 930 x 860.
14. **Ingres**, J. A. D. *Josephine-Eléonore-Marie-Pauline de Galard de Brassac de Béarn, Princess de Broglie*, 1853, oil on canvas, 1213 x 908.
15. **Bedinfield**, J. *Le Modèle S'Amuse*, 1890, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.
16. **O'Keefe**, Georgia, *Black Iris*, 1926, oil on canvas, 813 x 655.
17. **O'Keefe**, Georgia, *Black Place III*, 1944, oil on canvas, 813 x 904.
18. **Saville**, Jenny, *Rubens' Flap*, 1999, oil on canvas, 3000 x 2400.
19. **Muske**, Eve, *orange, blue, mirror, skin, grid*, 1992, mixed media installation, overall dimensions 2743 x 1829.
20. **Godfrey-Isaacs**, Laura, *Pink Surface*, (detail), 1992, oil on canvas, 1981 x 1880.
21. **Lee**, Rosa, *Speculum No.7*, 1990, oil on canvas, 1015 x 915.
22. **Bradford**, Michele, *Pierced Hermaphrodite*, 1993, photographic montage, dimensions unknown.
23. **Lau**, Grace, 'What She Wants' from *Transformations*, 1992, dimensions unknown.
24. **Sproul**, Linda, *Which side do you dress?*, 1992, performance.
25. **Schneemann**, Carolee, *Fuses*, with James Tenney and cat Kitch, 1964-5, film footage.
26. **Kubota**, Shigeko, *Vagina Painting*, 1965, performance at Perpetual Fluxfest, New York.
27. **Benglis**, Linda, 'Advertisement' *Artforum*, 13 November 1974.
28. **Dingle**, Kim, *Wild Girls*, 1993, oil on linen, 1840 x 1535.
29. **Braderman**, Joan, *No More Nice Girls*, 1989, video still.
30. **Sprinkle**, Annie, *Post Porn Modernism*, 1989, performance.
31. **Duchamp**, Marcel, *Etant donnes: la chute d'eau; le gaz d'eclairage*, 1946-66, mixed media, 2510 x 2041 x 4060.

32. **Cummins**, Pauline and Louise **Walsh**, 'Whale Woman', 1992, from *Sounding the Depths*, Cibachrome print, one of five, each 1854 x 1280.

All the following works by the artist unless otherwise stated.

33. *Kiss*, 1997, oil on glass, 2 panels each 490 x 630, total work 490 x 1300.
34. *Kiss*, (detail), 1997, oil on glass, 2 panels each 490 x 630, total work 490 x 1300.
35. *Untitled*,1997, oil on glass, 2 panels each 490 x 630, total work 490 x 1300.
36. *Bud*, 1997, oil on glass, panels each 490 x 630, total work 490 x 1300.
37. *Objects*, 1998, oil on glass, 2 panels each 820 x 400, total work 820 x 830.
38. *Vanitas*, 1998, oil on glass, 5 panels each 1300 x 400 total work 1300 x 3000.
39. *Gloves*, 1998, graphite on paper, 2010 x 1060.
40. *Alice*, 1999, inkjet print, 1230 x 850, framed 1460 x 1070.
41. *Frieze*, 1998, digital print, 1000 x3520.
42. *Nymph*, 1999, oil on glass, 1220 x 1000.
43. *Good Girl*, 1998, digital print, 820 x 580.
44. *Mute*, 1999, oil on glass, 1070 x 1000.
45. *Kewpie*, 1999, oil on glass, 1130 x 1000.
46. **Ingres**, J. A. D. *Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière*, 1806, oil on canvas 995 x 649.
47. *Font*, 1999, oil on glass, 2 panels each 500 x 400mm, total work 500 x 830.
48. *Breath*, 1999, oil on glass, 2 panels each 500 x 400mm, total work 500 x 830.
49. **Ingres**, J. A. D. *Marie Marcoz, Vicomtesse de Sennones*, 1816, oil on canvas, 1060 x 840.
50. *Transgress*, 1999, inkjet print, 1203 x 825, framed 1433 x 1045.
51. *Bridle*, 2000, inkjet print, 1200 x 820mm, framed 1430 x 1040.
52. *Porca 1*, 2000, inkjet print, 1200 x 820mm, framed 1430 x 1040.
53. *My First Words*, 2000, inkjet print, 1200 x 820mm, framed 1430 x 1040.
54. *Galumph*, 2001, inkjet print, 1390 x 950, framed 1620 1170.
55. *Riding the Skimmington*, 2001, inkjet print, 1390 x 900, framed 1620 x 1165.
56. *Each Drop*, 2001, inkjet print, 781 x 400, framed 1011 x 620.
57. *Every Stitch*, 2001, inkjet print, 781 x 400, framed 1011 x 620.
58. *Folly*, 2001, inkjet print, 1230 x 800, framed 1460 x 1020.

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E: Curriculum Vitae

Born 1957, New Norfolk, Tasmania.

Education

Master of Fine Arts, awarded 1997, Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart, University of Tasmania.

Diploma of Fine Arts, 1978, Canberra School of Art.

Selected Exhibitions

Hobart City Art Invitation Prize, 2001, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

Good Girl, 2000, First Draft Gallery, Sydney.

Good Girl, 1999, CAST Gallery, Hobart.

Hobart City Art Invitation Prize, 1999, Carnegie Gallery, Hobart.

Shell Fremantle Print Award, 1999, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle.

Offline, 1998, Jam Factory, as part of Adelaide Arts Festival (Web site: w.w.w.kitezh.com/offline)

Shell Fremantle Print Award, 1998, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle (High Commendation)

DARF, 1998, Research Exhibition, University Gallery, Hobart.

Containment, 1997, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart. (CAST touring to selected venues around Australia.)

Nought plus One, 1997, DARF Research Exhibition, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Shell Fremantle Print Award, 1997, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle.

Isea 96, 1996, Seventh International Symposium on Electronic Art, Rotterdam.

Shadows on the Skin, 1995, CAST Touring, Long Gallery, Hobart (touring to 8 venues within Australia).

Home:Body, 1995, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston and Carnegie Room, Hobart.

Colonial Past-time to Contemporary Practice, 1995, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

Figure/Ground, 1995, Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart.

Hobart City Art Invitation Prize, 1995, Carnegie Gallery, Hobart.

What's worth showing, 1994, Queen Victorian Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston.

Tell me a story, 1994, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Hobart City Art Invitation Prize, Carnegie Gallery, Hobart 1994.

The Flower, 1993, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart. (Touring to selected venues.)

Diversities, 1993, Northern Territory University Gallery, Darwin.

Ideal Format, 1992, GO-LO Contemporary Art Space, Darwin
Small Wonders, 1992, Adelaide Arts Festival, Roundspace Gallery, Adelaide.
Selected Acquisitions, 1992, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.
Hysterical Measurements, 1987, Chameleon Contemporary Art Space, Hobart.
Masters Exhibition, 1987, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart.
Selected Acquisitions, 1986, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

Referred Texts

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Spinks, Jennifer, 'Mirror, Mirror: Cruelty and Innocence', *Art in Australia,* Vol 35 No 2 1997, pp234-41.

Hansen, David,, 'Fling enough Mud', *Art Monthly*, Oct No 104 1997, pp22-23.

Knights, Mary,, 'To Have or to Hold', *Artlink*, 79 vol 17 no 3 1997, pp79-80.

Hart, Bill and Di **Klaosen**, 'Being Digital', *Imprint,* Autumn vol 32 no1 1997, pp26-28.

Snell, Ted, 'Much More to Life Beyond Politics' *The Australian* Frid Sept 5 1997, p10.

Kunda, Maria, 'The Pleasure is in the Paint: Art and Eroticism', *Siglo* no 8 June 1997, pp52-3.

Bond, Claire, 'The Contained Object', *Object,* 1-97, pp28-9.

Deeth, Jane, 'When you get behind closed doors' *Artlink* vol 16 no1 Autumn 1996, p80.

Stasko, Nicolette, 'Fruits of Light, Art in a Post-Modern Age', *Siglo,* no5 March 1996, pp4-11.

Murray, Kevin, 'In Case of millennium, break glass', *Art Monthly,* no 86 Dec 95-Feb 96, pp29-30.

McLean, Ian, 'Home;Body', *Art in Australia,* vol 33 no 2 Summer1995, p287-8.

Calahan, Anthony, 'Actions Louder than Words' *Artlink* vol 15 no 4 Summer 1995, p80.

Spinks, Jenny, 'Tell me a Story', *Art Monthly,* No 70 June 1994, pp22-23.

Wilson, Catherine, 'Framing a Story', *Contemporary Art Tasmania,* Issue 4 Winter 1994, pp36-39.

Hill, Peter, 'Floral Attributes', *Artlink,* Vol 13 No 1 1993, p87.

Hill, Peter, 'Tasmania Link', *Asia Art News*, September/October 1992, pp74-75.

Hill, Peter, 'The Flower', *Bulletin,* December-January 1992-93, p153.

Exhibition Catalogues

Kunda, Maria, *Good Girl,* CAST Gallery Publication, November 1999.

Murray, Kevin, 'Offline: An Exhibition of Soft Hardware' catalogue essay in *Sacred and Profane,* Adelaide Festival Visual Arts Program 1998, pp95-96.

Bond, Clare, 'Containment' catalogue essay *Containment,* Plimsoll Gallery Publication, University of Tasmania, 1997, pp6-13.

Rice, Clare, 'Excision' catalogue essay *Shadows on the Skin,* CAST Gallery Publication 1995.

Spinks, Jennifer, 'My Fair Lady', catalogue essay *Home:Body*, Arthouse Publication, July 1995, pp9-13.

Holmes, Jonathon, *Tell me a Story*, Plimsoll Gallery Publication, University of Tasmania April 94 pp34-39.

Mason, Penny, *What's worth showing*, Arthouse Publication, August 1994.

Grants and Awards

Large Australian Research Grant, 1997-8, 'Characterisation of Digital Mesostructures in Computer Generated Imagery', with G. Parr and B. Hart, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Honorary Visiting Fellow, 1996, COFA, University of N.S.W.

Gunnery Studios Residency, NSW Ministry of the Arts Award,,1996, Artspace, Sydney.

Teaching Merit Certificate, 1996, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Australian Research Council Grant, 1995-7, 'The Application of Digital Printing Technologies to Traditional Painting and Printmaking Techniques', with M Milojevic, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Teaching Merit Certificate, 1995, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Arts Tasmania Grant, 1995.

Small Australian Research Council Grant, 1993, "Dichotomies of Desire" University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Departmental Research Grant, 1992, School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Residency Grant, 1991, Verdaccio Studio, Italy, Australia Council, Visual Arts and Crafts Board.

Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board Grant, 1991, Travel Grant.

Collections

Artbank, Sydney.

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

University of Tasmania Fine Arts Collection, Hobart.

Private Collections, Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Darwin, Hobart.

Conference Papers

'Beyond Perspectivalism: Sensuality and Detachment in Images of the Female Body', 2000, *Sensation 2: Images, Bodies and New Trajectories*, The Second National Postgraduate Conference for Research Students in Fine Arts, Performance, Art History and Theory, COFA, University of N.S.W.

'Surface and Tactility: New Approaches to Picturing the Female Body', 2001, *latest editions*, Postgraduate Printmedia Conference, The Australian National University, Canberra School of Art.

Appendices

Curatorial

Rosamond, 1999, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Re:search, 1997, co-curated with Paul Zika, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart.

The Collectable Eggbeater, 1995, co-curated with Heather B Swann, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart.

Selected Works, 1988, Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart.